AL-Raida

Lebanese American University

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The Pioneer

الرائدة



Women and Literature

ABOUT IWSAW

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) was established in 1973 at the Lebanese American University (formerly Beirut University College). The founder and Director of the IWSAW is Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr. Initial funding for the Institute was provided by the Ford Foundation.

OBJECTIVES: The Institute strives to serve as a data bank and resource center to advance a better understanding of issues pertaining to Arab women and children; to promote communication among individuals, groups and institutions throughout the world concerned with Arab women; to improve the quality of life of Arab women and children through educational and development projects; and to enhance the educational and outreach efforts of the Lebanese American University.

PROJECTS: IWSAW activities include local, regional and international conferences; seminars, lectures and films; and educational projects which improve the lives of women and children from all sectors of Lebanese society. The Institute houses the

Women's Documentation Center in the Stoltzfus Library at LAU. The Center holds books and periodicals. The Institute also publishes a variety of books and monographs on the status, development and conditions of Arab women, in addition to Al-Raida. Twelve children's books with illustrations. and two guides, one of which specifies how to set up children's libraries, and the other which contains information about producing children's books, have also been published by IWSAW. In addition, the Institute has also created income generating projects which provide employment training and assistance to women from war-stricken families in Lebanon. The Institute has also devised a "Basic Living Skills Project" which provides a non-formal, integrated educational program for semi-literate in development women involved projects. **IWSAW** projects include: Additional Rehabilitation Program for Children's Mental Health; Teaching for Peace; and the Portable Library Project. The latter project was awarded the Asahi Reading Promotion Award in 1994. For more information about these or any other projects, write to the Institute at the address provided below.

ABOUT AL-RAIDA

Al-Raida is published quarterly by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW) of the Lebanese American University (LAU), formerly Beirut University College, P.O. Box 13-5053/59, Beirut, Lebanon; Telephone: (01) 867-618, ext. 288; Fax: (01) 867-098. The American address of LAU is 475 Riverside Drive, Room 1846, New York, NY 10115, U.S.A.; Telephone: (212) 870-2592; Fax: (212) 870-2762. e-mail: jabunasr@flame.beirut.lau.edu.lb

PURPOSE AND CONTENT: Al-Raida's mission is to enhance networking between Arab women and women all over the world; to promote objective research of the conditions of women in the Arab world, especially conditions related to social change and development; and to report on the activities of the IWSAW and the Lebanese American University. Each issue of Al-Raida

features a File which focuses on a particular theme, in addition to articles, conference reports, interviews, book reviews and art news.

REPRINT RIGHTS: No unsigned articles may be reprinted without proper reference to *Al-Raida*. Permission to reprint signed articles must be obtained from the IWSAW.

SUBMISSION OF ARTICLES: We seek contributions from those engaged in research, analysis and study of women in the Arab world. Contributions should not exceed ten double-spaced typed pages. Please send a hard copy and a diskette. We reserve the right to edit in accordance with our space limitations and editorial guidelines. Submissions will not be published if they have been previously published elsewhere.



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Cover Dainting: "Woman Drawing (Françoise)", 1951, oil on plywood by Pablo Picasso.

Al-Raida

The Quarterly Journal of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World

Women Since 1960.

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Editorial

ANY GHOSTS TO FIGHT, MANY PREJUDICES TO OVERCOME"

hen asked by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World to write an introductory article (on the short stories written by Lebanese women since 1960) to a "Bibliography of Lebanese Woman's Writing," I did not hesitate despite many other responsibilities. Starting off, I had expected a handful of stories, but I began to discover that the number of stories as well as novels written by women is considerable. I found out that with the exception of few writers, the bulk of women's writing is virtually unknown to the reader despite the sound quality of many of their works.

While the majority of women's work is underestimated compared to the works of male writers, only few women such as Layla Baalbakki, Hanan al-Shaykh, Emily Nassrallah, Ghada al-Samman, and Layla Ussayran have enjoyed recognition. The fact that Nasrallah, al-Samman, and Ussayran have continued to publish regularly since the 1960's until the present, has kept them generally within the field of literary and artistic visiblity. As for Layla Baalbakki, the stir created by her collection of short stories entitled A Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon (Safinat Ḥanan 'ila al-Qamar, 1963) and the charge of immorality must have incited people to read her book if only out of curiosity. Baalbakki was summoned to the office of the chief of the Beirut vice squad who carried out an investigation concerning the subject and words used in her book of short stories. Baalbakki's defense lawyers clarified her intentions and asserted that the "stories in question do not arouse sexual instincts or harm public morality." On the contrary, the "work is to be seen rather as a serious creative effort, a call to set people free from their narrow environments, a call for all of us to face the naked truth and its ramifications, to see good and evil and to learn to choose between them, not with eyes closed with the trachoma of tradition that has woven a veil of ignorance around us, but with eyes wide open toward the light." While al-Shaykh was recognized in Lebanon only after her books attracted the attention of Western readers and scholars, and after The Story of Zahra (Hikāyat Zahrah, 1980) was translated into English in 1986.

Needless to say, the vast majority of fiction written by women has remained unknown and unappreciated. One reason for this is that poetry, considered the superior genre and monopolized by male writers, overshadowed most

works of fiction, particularly those written by women. At the same time, the general prejudice against women and the strongly ingrained view of the "limitation" of their lives, their personal experience and, consequently, their intellectual and cultural abilities have kept many women on the defensive and made them shun personal issues and embrace general and public themes. For instance, in her entitled Colored Ribbons (Shara'it autobiography Mulawwanah, 1994), Layla Ussayran describes herself as a representative of a generation and insinuates that if the reader is looking for any information regarding her personal life, he will discover that her greatest passion is her struggle in the national movement and the Palestinian resistence. Similarly, 'Anbara Salam in her autobiography Roaming Memories between Lebanon and Palestine (Jawlah fi al-Zikrayat bayna Lubnan wa Falastin, 1978) refers to her work as a "history of an era that I lived and a representation of historical and social incidents."

The fact that women have been associated with the "trivialities" of housework and the limitations of the home plot has emboldened critics and encouraged them either to approach women's work with condescension and with a sense of superiority, or to overlook it completely. It is worthwhile noting here that many of those who have reviewed women's writing or have written about it have been predominantly women rather than men. It is as though women's writing was the man's least concern. This attitude still persists at universities where fiction by men is given precedence, while fiction by women is virtually nonexistent in the class room. Nevertheless, the most worrying part of it is that many of the women who have reviewed works written by women have approached them with the same tools and criteria adopted by men, and thus manifested, in many cases, a great deal of misunderstanding of and prejudice against women's writing.

For instance, according to Aida Labaki, literature is a mission, and because women's daily life does not allow them to devote all their time to literature, they have not excelled in their work. The meagerness of their input can be measured against the productivity and resourcefulness of male writers like Tawfiq al-Hakim and Mikhail Nuaymah. Accordingly, and owing to the paucity of their productions, their works have not left the right impact on the literary

world2. Some other critics assume that women are out of their depth when they enter the complex and sophisticated realm of language. Baalbakki's overuse of colloquialisms in Al-Aliha al-Mamsukhah displeased many critics such as Ayidah Idriss (who reviewed Baalbakki's novel in Al-Jadid in August 1961), and according to Joseph Zeidan, "led them [the critics] to charge her with chasing after the peculiar and unusual at the expense of the essential eloquence of the Arabic language."3 In addition to her style, Baalbakki's supposed indiscretion when it came to woman's sexuality and awareness of her body offended many readers including female readers. This is not to say that all critics were unfavorable when it came to women's writing. For Aida Matraji, for instance, fiction has contributed to the liberation of women. It has helped to release them from chains and has enabled them to seek work and free themselves economically, socially, and culturally. This desire for freedom can be seen in the outright rejection of rigid traditions in the works of Layla Baalbakki and Colette Khoury.4

Despite the fact that women writers since the 1960's have had, to use Virginia Woolf's words, "many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome," one could say that the situation is changing today. Interest in women's writing has grown and multiplied, and both critics and the general reader are becoming more favorable and more appreciative of their work. In 1990. Huda Barakat's The Stone of Laughter (Hajar al-Dahek, 1990) won Al-Naqid prize for best first novel, and Rene al-Hayek won the prize for originality and inventiveness in the domain of the short story (at the Beirut 38th Exhibition of the Arabic Book) for her first collection of short stories entitled Portraits to be Forgotten (Portraits lil-Nisyan, 1994). A number of critical books have appeared notably Miriam Cooke's War's Other Voices (1987), Evelyne Accad's Sexuality and War (1990), and Joseph Zeidan's Arab Women Novelists (1995), not to mention reviews, articles, and chapters in books in Arabic and English on a number of women writers.

Despite such positive signs, the fact remains that many women writers have been neglected, and their contributions forgotten and consigned to oblivion. Among such contributions are Balqis al-Humani's Al-Lija Quarter (Ḥayy al-Lija, 1969), a remarkable novel that deserves attention, in addition to other novels and a vast number of short stories that deserve notice and consideration. Since the majority of these writers have been overlooked and virtually forgotten, and since their works are out of print and not readily available, the need arises for serious academic work in the field. In this context, one could say that the Bibliography of Women's Writing since 1960

soon to be published by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab world is an excellent and valuable contribution that will facilitate scholarship on women writers and contribute to the rediscovery of hidden talents.

The obstacles that scholars are faced with when they come to work on Lebanese female as well as male writers are real. Even though some of these problems may appear trivial, they still create endless difficulties for the scholar. Among such impediments are those related to the actual publications themselves where the reader is given no information as to the nationality or gender of the author. Other problems occur when a reader comes across a second or third edition of a book, without any reference to the date (and publisher) of the first edition. In other cases, the problem is further complicated when one finds no indication whatsoever as to whether a book has been published or printed before, and, therefore, the reader assumes a second or third edition of a book to be simply a newly published work.

Keeping in mind that the bulk of the material is out of print and that no authoritative bibliographies are available, and since publishers have made little effort to provide the relevant information on a new writer, or on a writer's earlier publications, how can any one possibly do serious critical work on female or male writers for that matter? Amidst this muddle and confusion, the fact remains that scholarly work is badly needed today and must be encouraged, and, perhaps the only entity that is well-equipped to do serious work on the subject is the University.

Samira Aghacy Professor of English Lebanese American University

Notes

- 1. Elizabeth Warnock Fernea and Bassima Qattan Bezirgan, ed., Middle Eastern Muslim Women Speak (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1978), p.289.
- "Adibat al- 'Arabiyya wa Adab al-Mar'a," (Al-Ḥikmah, February 2, 1960), p. 43.
- 3. Arab Women Novelists (New York: State University of New York, 1995), p. 102.
- 4. "Adab al-Mar'a wa al-Mujtama' al-'Arabi," Majallat al-Ṭariq (Nov.-Dec., 1969),pp. 132-135.

Unitied". 1970, plaster relief, Maliha Afnan

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor.

followed with great interest and appreciation your two articles in the two issues of *Al-Raida* (winter 1997), one on Seza the pioneer journalist-writer in Lebanon and another on "Alicia Ghiragossian: the Trilingual Poet," in the United States, both persons well known to me, the former as a very intimate friend. I congratulate Ms. Azadouhi Kalaidjian for having done justice to both and admire the breadth of her horizon and the depth of her analysis. Seza's article did justice to a true pioneer who kept her voice strong against odds not uncommon to pioneers. She never hesitated to chastise when expected standards were not there be they in community performances or otherwise, and, at the same time, educated the community on past and current issues.

The article is a weighty and fair display of Seza's place in women's history in Lebanon. You are aware that the well known **Armenian Mirror Spectator Weekly** reproduced it from *Al-Raida*, which was a good way of creating awareness of the magazine in our widespread community in the United States. You will be glad to know that the well known journalist Dikran Tospatt had an article on her recently in **Nor Gyank Weekly**, as a person who knew her intimately as brother-in-law and fellow journalist. The article was on the occasion of Seza being honored by the Armenian International Women's Association at their international conference in Paris.

I must confess the article on Alicia was a delightful surprise to me for I was not aware of your interest in the analysis of poetry! I hope you are able to send a copy of *Al-Raida* to her.

Now a few words about Al-Raida, which through the years has improved both in content and format bringing credit to us at the international level. It has become the voice of outstanding women in the Middle East and has mirrored their concerns, talents, problems, academic standards, and their world that has remained hidden for the most part. Julinda Abu Nasr must be celebrated for this feat. I consider it a feat, even though I am not surprised for I remember her in my classroom at the College, decades ago, with glittering eyes, always alert, always ready to penetrate the world of ideas, with a dream for the future ... with hard work. I am gratified for this connection.

Best wishes

Pergrouhi Svajian, Ph. D.
Professor Emeritus
Brooklyn College of the
City University of New York



Conference

An International Women's Convention, "Salon Femmes de la Mediterranee", organized by The Women Journalist of the Mediterranean Network (NGO), will take place, for the first time, from September 24-30, 1997 in the Foire Internationale de Casablance in Morocco. The convention aims principally at bringing together women from the North and South regions of the Mediterranean countries in the hope of improving women's social status through their participation in economic and political decision-making. The convention's promoter encourages and welcomes women from other parts of the world who express their desire for participation.

Competition

The Coordinating Council For Women in History and the Berkshire Conference on Women Historians announced the eighth annual competition for two \$500 Graduate Student Awards to assist in dissertation work. Applicants must be women graduate students in history from any US institution.

For applications, write to: Professor Janice M. Leone, Award Committee, Department of History, Middle Tennessee State University, Box 23, Murfreesboro TN 37132. Deadline for submission of applications is September 15, 1997.

Recent Publications

Abdullah, Ahmad. Al-Wa'i al-Qanuni lil-Mar'ah al-Miṣriyyah, "The Egyptian Woman's Legal Awareness". Cairo: Ittihad al-Muḥamin al-'Arab. 1995. (Arabic)

Allen, Roger. Hilary Kilpatrick and Ed. de Moor (Ed.). Love and Sexuality in Modern Literature. London: Al-Sāqi Bookshop. 1995.

Arebi, S. Women and Words in Saudi Arabia. London: Al-Saqi Bookshop. 1994.

Bilarby, Aisha (Ed.). *Nisa' Qurawiyyat*, "Rural Women". Morocco: Dar Nashr al-Fanak. 1996. (Arabic).

Haider, Raana. *Gender and Development*. Cairo: American University of Cairo (AUC). 1996.

Markaz al-Mar'ah lil-Istisharat wa al-Musa'adah al-Qanuniyyah. *An Examination of the Status of Palestinian Women*. Jerusalem: The Markaz 1995.

Singerman, Diane and Homa Hoodfar (Ed.). Development, Change and Gender in Cairo, USA: Indiana U. Press. 1996.

New Releases from "Women Make Movies"*

The Women Next Door, directed by Michal Aviad, is an intimate documentary journey through Israel and the Occupied

Territories to find out how the intifada and Occupation has affected women on both sides of the conflict.

Beirut: The Last Home Movie, directed by Jennifer Fox, is a chronicle of three months in the life of a Lebanese family choosing to remain in its bombed-out Beirut neighborhood despite constant threats of fire, snipers and factional strife.

A Tajik Woman, directed by Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa, focuses upon issues of exile and cultural conflict for Muslim women from Afghanistan and Iran living in the United States.

Voices of the Morning, directed by Meena Nanji, is inspired by The Hidden Face of Eve by world-renowned Egyptian feminist writer Nawal El Saadawi. It follows the socialization process and personal struggles of a young woman living under Orthodox Islamic law.

* Women Make Movies is the leading non-profit distributor of films and video tapes by and about women, with a multicultural collection of more than 350 titles. To purchase or rent any of these titles, or to obtain a copy of the complete Women Make Movies catalogue, contact: Women Make Movies, 462 Broadway, Suite 500 ST, New York, NY 10013, Tel: 212/925.0606, Fax 212/925, e-mail:cinema@wmm.com

Expert Group Meetings (EGMs) Planned

The UN Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) in conjunction with other UN agencies and selected NGOs, has announced the following EGMs in preparation for the 50th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, 2-13 March 1998:

- 1) October 13-17, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia The Girl Child
- 2) November 9-12, Toronto, Canada Gender Based Persecution
- December 1-4, Finland Promoting Women's Enjoyment of Economic and Social Rights.

In addition, an EGM on Aging Women is planned from November 29 to December 2, 1997 in Malta, in preparation for the International Year of old people in 1999.

For more detail on these meetings, contact: UN Division for the Advancement of Women. Fax: (1-212)963-3463 or check out UN WOMENWATCH site on the World Wide Web at http://www.un.org/womenwatch/un.htm. Information on the entire UN system on work related to women can be found at this site.

A Call for Information on Violence Against Women

At the Commission on Human Rights, March 10 - April 18, 1997, the mandate for the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women was extended for 3 more years. Information for the 1998 Report of the Special Rapporteur is needed with particular emphasis on:

- 1) Custodial violence against women
- 2) Documentation of sexual violence against women during

Reasearch Reasearch Reasearch Reasearch

times of conflict.

3) Violence against refugee and internally displaced women.

Materials for the report should be received prior to September 1997. However, all submissions regarding violence against women can be sent at anytime of the year.

Contact: Radhika Coomaraswamy. UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, 8 Kynsey Terrace. Colombo 8, Sri Lanka, or c/o UN Centre for Human Rights, 8-14 Avenue de la Paix, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland: Tel: (41-22)917-9123. Email: mkohonen.hchr@onog.ch>. The Geneva Working Group on Women's Human Rights also reported that out of the 75 resolutions adopted at the 1997 Commission meeting, 35 resolutions dealt with the rights of women and young girls.

Preparatory Committee Meetings on the Establishment of an Internal Criminal Court (ICC)

The dates for upcoming PreCom meetings are:

- 1) August 4-15, 1997
- 2) December 1-12, 1997
- 3) March 16 April 3, 1998

For information on how you can become involved in the Women's Caucus, contact: Aida Facio, ICC Women's Caucus: Fax (1-212) 682-5354. E-

mail:<iccwomen@maclaw.law.cuny.edu>.

Research Abstract

Rahal, Samira Muhammed. "The Status of the Aged in the Family." Lebanese University, M.A Thesis, Department of Social Sciences 1992-1993.

In her study, Samira Rahal aims to portray the life of the aged in Lebanon, their status, the problems and illnesses afflicting them, as well as the amount of care and attention given to them by family members, society, and public institutions. Rahal holds that old age is a stage in life that cannot be disregarded or neglected. Hence, in her study she attempts to portray ways in which one can improve the situation and living conditions of the elderly by making them feel needed and important. Rahal argues that old people suffer from psychological, economic, and social problems that are ignored by society at large.

One Hundred individuals of both sexes (50 men and women) were involved in Rahal's study. The participants, aged sixty-four and above, had different educational backgrounds. Some were illiterate while others had elementary, secondary or university degrees.

Rahal made use of questionnaires through which she found that the elderly in her sample favored living alone or with their spouses rather than residing with their children, relatives, or in institutions. She also discovered that the aged prefer to resume working, but are unable to due to retirement laws, bad health, frailty etc.. Moreover, she detected anxiety on the part of old people who are concerned about the future, what it holds, and their ability to remain economically self sufficient. She affirms that the aged suffer from loneliness; they seldom go out and are rarely visited by friends who are too ill and frail to get around. This isolation increases with time rendering them introverts. Moreover, in order to overcome their boredom, they start interfering in other people's lives and giving their opinions on how things should be done.

Rahal concludes that the Lebanese war had a positive effect on the status of the aged forcing people to come together and unite. Yet, the change that has taken place in the family structure, where most families nowadays are nuclear rather than extended, along with the deteriorating socio-economic situation has had adverse effects on the elderly. Rahal maintains that young people today are independent: married and sometimes unmarried offspring live alone, and in this way discharge themselves of their duties towards their parents. The pressing need to work in order to survive, forces children to neglect their obligations towards their parents.

Khazaal, Fatmeh. "The Effect of the Father's Absence in the Family on the Social Life of the Children." *Lebanese University, M.A Thesis, Department of Social Sciences* 1994-1995.

The father's absence is a social phenomenon present in all societies according to Fatmeh Khazaal. Her study highlights this situation which is a major problem afflicting the life of young people particularly those aged 6-14 years who require the presence of a father in their lives.

Khazaal's study is restricted to library research (no field work was conducted). She maintains that the absence of the father affects a child profoundly in the course of life for it brings about major problems that hinder his/her physical, mental, emotional, and social development.

Khazaal reports that fatherless children are often reckless, very blunt, and impolite. They suffer from feelings of instability; they isolate themselves from the outside world by refusing to interact with people. Besides, they worry a lot and are distraught most of the time. Kazaal also shows that the absence of the primary bread-winner causes economic instability in the family which, in turn, brings about insecurity and repression that sometimes leads to delinquency and theft. Khazaal maintains that the father is needed in times of crisis to solve his children's problems, give them guidance and advice, help them to discover their areas of interest, and cultivate their

Kazaal concludes that the importance of the father in the life of his children is evident for he is the one who attends to the psycho-social and physical needs of his dependents. She affirms that his presence offers the security, love, and affection which makes children feel wanted and gives them more self confidence. She also asserts that mothers are unable to compensate for the loss of a father or his absence. Kazaal also notes that cultural interests (theater, academic lectures, debates, exhibitions, etc.) and the media help to diminish the emptiness brought about by the loss of a father.

Quote, Unquote

ut, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction - what has that got to do with a room of one's own? I will try to explain. When you asked me to speak about women and fiction I sat down on the banks of a river and began to wonder what the words meant... The title women and fiction might mean, and you may have meant it to mean, women and what they are like, or it might mean women and the fiction that is written about them; or it might mean somehow all three are inextricably mixed together and you want me to consider them in that light. But when I began to consider the subject in this last way, which seemed the most interesting, I soon saw that it had one fatal drawback. I should never be able to come to a conclusion... All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point - a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved."

(Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992 pp. 3-4)

"Who are the Beirut Decentrists? They are a group of women writers who have shared Beirut as their home and the war as their experience. They have been the decentred in a double sense: physically, they were scattered all over a self-destructing city; intellectually, they moved in separate spheres. They wrote alone and for themselves. They would not conceive of their writings as related to those of others, yet their marginal perspective, which gave insight into the holistic aspect of the war, united them and allowed them discursively to undermine and restructure society around the image of a new center."

(Miriam Cooke, War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War, New York, Syracuse University Press, 1996 p.3)

"Several Arab women writers that I know (including Layla Ba'albakki, Hanan al-Shaykh and Emily Nasrallah), have expressed their irritation at the way in which Western feminist critics have appropriated their works and manipulated their contents to serve a feminist agenda that is largely alien to the authors themselves. They are disturbed not only by what they perceive as the antagonistic, overtly anti-male stance of some feminist critics, but also by a sense of frustration that their writing is somehow being marginalised, almost ghettoised, into a female literary enclosure in which they are disenfranchised from mainstream literature. They complain of not wanting to be known as 'feminist' writers, but just as writers; not wanting to be renowned for their stance on women, but for their general outlook on life as well as the calibre of their prose;

not wanting to receive critical acclaim for their abilities to highlight inequalities between the sexes, but for their skills in depicting a broad spectrum of inequalities, injustices and contradictions in the Arab world and beyond."

(Mai Yammani, Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives, London, Ithaca Press, 1996 pp. 133-134)

"Just try writing for a few days. ... Start tomorrow. Put your moisturizing cream away, get up an hour earlier and sit yourself down with a pen in front of a blank page. And bring some patience to the task. Lots of patience. Suddenly, things will happen. The page will come alive, your brain will click into gear, your body will be energized and your ideas will come together. Writing I tell you is the best remedy for all kinds of crises, all types of wrinkles. The only thing it really can't cure is greying hair. You'll have to use henna for that. ... Write for an hour everyday. Anything. Even a letter to your local electricity company to tell them the light outside your house isn't working. You've no idea what an effect this daily exercise will have on your skin: the grimace at the corner of your mouth will disappear; the line where you knitted your brows will fade; your eyes will widen; and, with all this, inner peace will come."

> (Fatima Mernissi, Women's Rebellion and Islamic Memory, London, Zed Books, 1996 p. 1)

"Women who remain in abusive situations tend to manifest 'battered woman syndrome,' a set of symptoms that appear together or separately. ... The syndrome develops through three phases: tension; aggression; and reconciliation, better known as the 'honeymoon' period. The continuity of these stages becomes a behavioural cycle - the 'cycle of domestic violence' ... The first phase is characterized by a gradual increase in the tension, small acts that generate friction and conflicts between the couple, such as insults and physical abuse. ... Physical, sexual and psychological abuse are characteristic of the aggression phase. ... In the reconciliation or 'honeymoon' phase, the abuser asks forgiveness, cries, begs on his knees, tries to help the victim, shows her all sorts of consideration and remorse with gifts or promises to change. This is the moment in which the woman is positively reinforced to stay in the relationship. There are no tensions or violence, so she sees the 'good side' of her partner, believing that she can help him change his behaviour."

(Communiqué issue 2, April - September, 1997 p. 1)

"The beauty of the girl, a being who (as you so beautifully say) 'has not yet achieved anything,' is motherhood that has a presentiment of itself begins to prepare, becomes anxious, yearns. And the mother's beauty is motherhood that serves,

and in the old woman there is a great remembering. And in the man too there is motherhood, it seems to me, physical and mental; his engendering is also a kind of birthing, and it is birthing when he creates out of his innermost fullness. And perhaps the sexes are more akin than people think, and the great renewal of the world will perhaps consist in one phenomenon: that man and woman, freed from all mistakes, feelings and aversions, will seek each other not as opposites but as brother and sister, as neighbors, and will unite as human beings, in order to bear in common, simply, earnestly, and patiently, the heavy sex that has been laid upon them.

(Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet, Massachusetts, Shambhala Publications, Inc. 1984 pp. 55-56)

"Arab women's feminist discourse has addressed universal issues such as education and work, rights concerning marriage, and suffrage, and at the same time has confronted less universal issues such as breaking out of gender segregation. Like women in many other third world countries, and unlike western women, Arab women have typically had to pioneer their feminist expression in agrarian societies, more recently experiencing modern urbanisation, and in societies where religion has remained an important regulator of everyday life and a source of identity. These Arab and other third world societies have typically experienced European colonial rule and/or western imperialist hegemony while Arab women's feminisms were beginning to be articulated. Arab women's feminist voices have always run the risk of being discredited as antinationalist or anti-religious. Women in the Arab world have had more complex battles to fight than have feminists in the West with their strikingly different histories circumstances."

(Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing, London, Virago Press, 1990 Introduction xxxiii)

"War, the most dramatic form of violence, exacts a heavy toll on women, rendering them among the most vulnerable social groups in time of conflict. Armed conflicts in Central America, the Middle East and Africa are leaving behind a growing number of civilian casualties, an increasing proportion of which are women. Wars are also responsible for some 16 million refugees, the majority of whom are widowed or abandoned women and their dependent children. These women lead a life of permanent displacement, struggling to survive in overcrowded refugee camps, often with few prospects of resuming normal lives or returning to their countries of origin. War victimizes men and women alike; however, it often serves as a catalyst for social and political change. For example, Kuwaiti women who remained inside their country during the Iraqi

occupation daily risked their lives. 'I have known what it is to suffer for my country,' said one Kuwaiti woman. 'No one can say that I do not deserve the same rights as these men."

(Women: Challenges to the Year 2000, United Nations, New York, 1991 p. 74)

"... over a lifetime, one out of two women will die of heart disease, and only one out of eight gets bresst cancer, but under age 75, there are three times more deaths from breast cancer than heart disease, and if you take the smokers out, six times more deaths from breast cancer than heart disease, so it's not an even match. And the breast cancer risk does go up the longer you're on hormone therapy, and if you've been on it for over five years, particularly over ten years, you see an increased risk of breast cancer. ... One of the things we lose sight of is that menopause is not a disease. We're talking about prevention. You may be willing to take some risks if you have a life-threatning disease that you're treating. But if you're healthy, then do you want to risk a life-threating disease in order to potentially prevent something which you don't even know you're going to get?

(Ms. Magazine, July/August1997, p. 39)

Here is a strange paradox. Woman instinctively wants to give, yet resents giving herself in small pieces. Basically is this a conflict? Or is it an over-simplification of many-stranded problem? I believe that what woman resents is not so muh giving herself in pieces as giving herself purposelessly ... Even purposeful giving must have some source that refills it ... If it is woman's function to give, she must be replenished too. But how? Solitude, says the moon shell. Every person, especially every woman, should be alone sometime during the year, some part of each week, and each day. How revolutionary that sounds and how impossible of attainent. To many women such a program seems quite out of reach ... By and large, mohters and housewives are the only workers who do not have regular time off. They are the great vacationless class ... Herein lies one key to the problem. If women were convinced that a day off or an hour of solitude was a reasonable ambition, they would find a way of attaining it ... As far as the search for solitude is concerned, we live in a negative atmosphere ... The world today does not understand, in either man or woman, the need to be alone ... The artist knows he must be alone to create; the writer. to work out his thoughts; the musician, to compose; the saint, to pray. But women need solitude in order to find again the true essence of themselves: that firm strand which will be the indispensable center of a whole web of human relationships ... Solitude alone is not the answer to this; it is only a step toward it ... The problem is not entirely in finding the room of one's own, the time alone, difficult as necessary as this is. The problem is more how to still the soul in the midst of its activities. In fact, the problem is how to feed the soul.

(Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Gift from the Sea, New York, Vintage Books, 1978 pp.46-51)

News Briefs

FROM LEBANON

UN Launched a Program for Institutionalization of a Women's Machinery

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has established a program in conjunction with the National Committee for Women's Affairs to promote the role of women in Lebanon. The UNDP will work with civil organizations as well as ministries to push for equality among the sexes, and include the progress of women within the national development program.

(The Daily Star, June 21, 1997)

Women in Politics

Lebanese MP, Nayla Mouawad, launched a campaign to promote women's participation in politics stressing that the issue affects civil society as a whole. The campaign, which includes surveys and studies of Lebanese opinions and obstacles against the promotion of women in politics, is to be implemented by the Renée Mouawad foundation (a local foundation) and the Spanish Fundacion Promocion Social de la Cultura (the foundation for the social promotion of culture), funded by the European Union. The findings of the campaign will be announced at the end of the first three-month phase. During the second three-month phase, the organizations will produce a practical guide for women who plan to venture into politics.

(The Daily Star, June 5, 1997)

FROM EGYPT

Women Victims in Egypt

Amnesty International sent an alert reporting that Egyptian security forces have detained and tortured dozens of women, in most - but not all - cases solely because of their marital or other familial relationship to men who are active in extremist religious Right ("fundamentalists") groups.

The organization called upon the Egyptian Government to:

- immediately release all those who are at present in detention under the Emergency Law for whom release orders have been issued by the courts;
- introduce immediate and effective measures to ensure that female detainees are protected from all forms of torture and illtreatment, including sexual abuse and harassment;
- publicly emphasize that torture and ill-treatment, including threats of rape and sexual abuse, by government agents are grave and intolerable human rights violations, and that anyone who commits such violations will be promptly brought to justice;
- ensure that statements or confessions extracted from detainees as a result of torture or ill-treatment including rape

and sexual abuse or threats of such treatment - must never be admitted in legal proceedings against them;

- set up prompt, thorough and impartial investigations into all reports of torture and make the methods and findings of these investigations public within reasonable time;
- provide fair and adequate compensation and rehabilitation for all victims of torture;
- ensure that any members of the security or other forces involved in torture and ill-treatment of detainees, including female detainees, be brought to justice;
- ensure that female staff be present at all times during interrogation of female detainees and prisoners and be solely responsible for any body searches which should not be carried out in any manner that constitutes cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.
- ensure that individuals are able to lodge official complaints on human rights violations and to contact national or international human rights groups without fear of reprisal, harassment or intimidation.

FROM TURKEY

International Kurdish Women Studies Network

An International Kurdish Women Studies Network is in the process of being established with the goal of promoting the study of Kurdish women from diverse disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. As a first step, the Network is planning to hold conferences and workshops, build an archive and a library, and compile a bibliography.

Those interested in gender studies of Kurdish society, activists in the women's movement, or those who want to contribute to the project may join by sending a concise CV (including areas of research interest, languages used, and address) to: Shahrazad Mojab, Department of Adult Education, OISE, 252 Bloor Street West, Toronto ON M5S 1V6 Canada (416-923-6641, ext. 2242; smojab@oise.utoronto.ca).

FROM NIGERIA

Arresting a Journalist

On March 20, 1997, Ladi Olorunyomi, a journalist who has worked for the "Concord" and the "Herald" newspapers, was arrested at 8:00 p.m. at the family's residence in the Palm Avenue neighborhood of Lagos. Four agents from the directorate of military intelligence and one female army officer searched the residence but did not remove anything from the premises. They then transported Olorunyomi to Apapa, a military intelligence holding facility where she was detained. The military intelligence agents gave no reason for the arrest and did not present a warrant. Ladi Olorunyomi's mother and sister have tried to visit her, but were denied access.

IWSAW News

The AIDOS Project

The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, (IWSAW) was selected to take part in an international project aimed at establishing four documentation centers -specialized in women's human, civic, labor and reproductive rights- in four Arab countries: Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The main objective of the project is to create an information network of women's organizations throughout the Mediterranean area.

The project is subsidized by the European Commission within the framework of the Community's Co-operation Program in the Mediterranean. It is administered by the Italian Association for Women in Development, AIDOS.

IWSAW has recently completed the first phase in the project which is to compile a bibliography on Women's Rights in Lebanon. The progress of this project will be reported consecutively in IWSAW News in *Al-Raida*.

Bibliography of Lebanese Women Writers and Poets in Lebanon

IWSAW is in the process of concluding its long awaited, and first of its kind work: A Bibliography of Lebanese Women Writers and Poets in Lebanon.

In addition to entries for more than one hundred and ten women, the bibliography contains three studies on women's literature in Lebanon: the Short Story, by Dr. Samira Aghacy; the Poetry by Sabah Zwein, and the Novel by Rashid al-Da'if.

The entry for each author provides a profile of the author's life, education, work, activities, and a bibliographic list of her works.

It is worth noting here, that the collection of information on these authors is a major achievement considering the present condition of the postal system in Lebanon, the inefficiency of telephone directory services, the lack of printed reference materials covering the subject ,and the movement of people in and out of Lebanon over the long years of war.

Female Labor Force in Lebanon

A study on "Female Labor Force in Lebanon" was conducted by IWSAW, with funding from the Agency for International Development (AID). It was executed by a working team provided by a Lebanese consulting firm (Consultation and Research Institute).

The goal of the study "is to provide the necessary database for formulating effective policies, plans for action, and specific projects, in order to establish feasible priorities for strategies targeted to women workers in Lebanon that are linked to the types of demand in the labor market.

Information in the study included:

- Attributes of working women (education, skills, training, experience, social status)
 - The size of the Lebanese female labor force.

- · Conditions of women at work.
- · Problems that working women face.
- · Job market demands for female labor.

The sample of working women was extracted from the base sample used by the Ministry of Social Affairs and UNFPA in conducting the "Population and Household Sample Survey".

The study is about 1000 pages long divided into two main parts: a comprehensive report, and statistical annexes. The report discusses the history and evolution of the female labor force in Lebanon, provides a description of the contemporary situation, and predicts future possibilities for female labor. Finally it concludes with general recommendations that can be used to improve the female labor supply to meet the demands of the labor market in Lebanon.

The study is under publication and will be available for those interested shortly.

Forthcoming Publications by IWSAW

- Working Women in Lebanon
- Lebanese Women Writers and Poets
- Women, Media and Sustainable Development
- Women in the Literature of Tayib al-Saleh
- Salwa Nassar, the First Lebanese Woman Physicist
- Sex and Marriage in the works of Hanan al-Shaykh



IWSAW Staff



LEBANESE WOMEN AND LITERATURE

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Since we are dealing with texts written by women, the question that comes to mind is whether or not there is a unique or particular way in which women inscribe representation. My examination of texts written by women as well as men from the 1950's to the present reveal that no clearcut or categorical differences occur between texts written by men and those written by women. There seems to be no difference in the language they use or the techniques employed in their writing. Is it a question of content then which makes texts written by women different?

Unlike men, women have been viewed as too personal and too self-absorbed in both their lives and their writing. Their texts are thought to be autobiographical and subjective, and their writing is viewed as generally restricted to private and secondary issues related to the domain of the house and the kitchen sink, rather than to public and ideological issues. To start with, one could say that such subjective themes are not solely restricted to women writers. Many fictional works by male writers can likewise be viewed as autobiographical or semi-autobiographical. For example, in Idle Days (Ayyam Za' idah,1991) by Hassan Daud, the character of the old man is based upon Daud's own grandfather as Daud himself has communicated to me, and Mathilde Building (Binayat Mathilde, 1983) is based on a building in which Daud's own family actually lived. Again, Rachid al-Da'if's novel Dear Mr. Kawabata ('Azizi al-Sayyid Kawabata, 1995) is loaded with autobiographical elements starting with the name of the protagonist/narrator which coincides with the author's own name Rachid, to his involvement with the Communist party, to references to a town that one finds no difficulty in identifying as Zgharta, al-Da'if's own hometown.

Such autobiographical references do not seem to constitute any drawbacks for these writers, though they seem to be problematic when it comes to women's writing. A novel written by a woman is generally considered a literal rendering of the writer's own personal life. Ghada al-Samman complains that critics have fallen into the trap of referring to her characters and herself interchangeably: "they argue with me about the conduct of the heroines of my stories and pronounce their moral judgments upon me to the extent that I was once afraid of being thrown into jail because one of my heroines had committed a crime" (Al-Samman, Al-Qabīlah Tastajwib al-Qatīlah, 1981, p.162).

Again if texts by women are said to deal with the limitations and restrictions of the home plot, many texts by men writers center around inner rather than outer space. Among such works are Mathilde Building by Hassan Daoud and Technicalities of Wretchedness (Taqaniyyāt al-Bu's,

1989) by Rachid al-Daif, where action takes place predominantly inside the domain of the house and concentrates on household chores. On the other hand, many works of fiction by women deal with women venturing outdoors, and either feeling ill at ease especially in restaurants and cafes as in I Survive ($An\overline{a}$ Ahy \overline{a} , 1958) by Lavla Baalbakki, or going all the way and entering the male arena in order to realize themselves. Among such works is al-Samman's story "There is No Sea in Beirut" (La Bahra fi Beirut, 1963) where the protagonist moves from Damascus to Beirut in her search for freedom, and in Solo on a Missing String (Tagasim 'ala Wataren Da'e', 1992) by Nazek Yared where the narrator shuttles between Palestine, Egypt and Beirut in her desire to acquire education and achieve personal independence. Again it is within the domain of open spaces and uncouth nature that the female artist is able to realize her creative potentials as the narrator in "The Poetess and the Goldfinch" (Mahattat al-Rahīl, 1996) by Emily Nasrallah explicitly asserts. These open spaces envisage new possibilities that go beyond the constraints of society and open new vistas and new possibilities.

Based upon the above, can one deduce that there are no differences between men's and women's writing? In answer to this question one could say that woman's contribution lies in a discourse that is rendered from a female rather than male point of view. For the first time, women are constituting themselves and are speaking in their own distinctive and individualistic voices, and the world they represent is, for the first time, perceived from a new and different angle of vision. In many of these texts the first person narration prevails, and, in some cases, confessional narration dominates the scene. In this manner, they are actually challenging cultural representations of women and overrunning gender differentiation. In a lecture given by the Palestinian writer Sahar Khalifeh on the International Day of Women at The Lebanese American University (1997), Khalifeh defines herself as a writer who intends to write about a real woman with flesh and blood, not the symbol or metaphor that one finds in texts written by men.

Many women are refusing to perceive themselves the way men perceive them, and in this manner they are creating alternative truths and representations. For instance, in **The Latin Quarter** (Al-Ḥayy al-Latini, 1953) by Suhayl Idriss and **The Shadow and the Echo** (Al-Ṣil wa al-Ṣadā, 1989) by Yussef Habshi al-Ashkar, the women (both French and not Lebanese or Arab) are hardly credible characters. They are representatives of the authors' own views of what women should be like rather than real women. These females are nothing like Lena in Baalbakki's **I Survive** or Zahra in **The Story of Zahra** (Ḥikāyat Zahrah, 1980) or Fattūm in **Al-Lijā**

File



Ouarter (Havy al-Lija. 1969). They fade away in comparison with solipsistic, self-centered, extrovert female in the works of Ghada al-Samman and the short stories of Layla Baalbakki, who have emerged out of silence into obsessive selfdefinition. If there is an air of adolescent raving and "naive romanticism" about some of them, to use Julia Kristeva's words, these women are all too prepared to indulge in the discovery of female selfhood.

What then are the major constituents Lebanese women's writing? The problem of mapping contemporary Lebanese women's fiction since 1960 is not easy. One could say, however, that these works are generally characterized by versatility, variety and multiplicity, showing the complexity and variation this literature. In addition to the above mentioned subjective trends, other texts written by women tend to have a strong political as well as social orientation, and the subjects are anchored securely in time and This place. understandable given the political and intellectual climate of the past forty years or so. The Lebanese war, in particular, is one major factor that drove women further into the public arena after having invaded the very privacy of their homes, making it virtually impossible for them not to react, or to remain on the margin. Therefore, many women opted to legitimize themselves as women by writing about and taking stands on such topics as the Lebanese war, freedom, independence, immigration, traditional values, gender problems, nationalistic issues, issues related to liberation, the Palestinian problem etc.

Such themes can be found in short stories by Nur Salman, Nuha Samara, Nuha Mussallam, Daisy al-Amir, Emily Nasrallah, Ghada al-Samman, and in longer works of fiction. In The Snake's Mark (Khat al-Af'ā, 1970), Layla Ussayran deals with major issues notably the liberation of Palestine. The characters she presents are in constant search for meaning, identity and human values. Emily Nasralla rejects worn out village traditions and pursues freedom from such restrictions. In The Oleander Tree (Shajarat al-Duflah, 1968) the female protagonist feels alienated and seeks refuge in nature. Retreating into herself, she searches for truth and justice, but the only consolation comes from nature. In The Circle Point (Nugtat al-Da'irah, n.d.) by Nazek Yared, the protagonist finds in work and a career for a woman the first step towards real and genuine liberation. Such fiction presents women as active, self-determined agents playing a positive and constructive role in society and striving to exert control over their lives by challenging the patriarchal order. These texts written within the realistic mode provide a very effective vehicle for the representation of themes that are overtly social and political.

By restricting their narratives to purely public and general issues, some writers choose self concealment in the use of male persona and the distancing third person narrative. evading the alluring and rather embarrassing first person. Others go a step further and insist on adhering to abstractions and generalities and emphasizing ideas and moral values rather than the actual story itself. One could say in this context that these writers have manifested a greater courage in the expression of their thoughts than ever before. In their desire to be heard and accepted by the patriarchal society, and in their attempt to adopt masculine attributes, some have incorporated semi-documentary material and have remained close to journalistic writing in order to legitimize their social, political, and moral stands. Other works can be viewed as speculative ramblings taking on fictional trappings. In this respect, one could say that these texts reveal and fight for a unified selfhood, a rational, coherent, and effective identity, and an active role within the patriarchal society.

If some writers opt for an effective public role, other female writers participate in the celebration of individualism by speaking about themselves forcefully, and directly, violating female propriety and transgressing gender boundaries. Many of these texts (short stories by Baalbakki and al-Shaykh) are tinged with the hue of eroticism and the hedonistic enjoyment of the body. Other texts incorporate exotic settings(particularly in the works of al-Shaykh) in order to underline the erotic and unrestricted atmosphere. By so doing, these women express a desire to use and control their

own bodies and manifest a more active female sexuality. In this manner, one could say that these texts deliberately attack phallocentric and patriarchal attitudes and propose a healthier and more balanced sexuality than texts written by male writers.

It is true that some writers identify themselves with the body and nature; however, far from barring them from participating in the historical and political sphere, sexual awareness is for them very strongly aligned with a new political consciousness and liberation from political oppression as seen in The Gray Danube (Rahil al-Marafi' al-Qadima, 1973) by al-Samman. Themes related to sexual pleasure, homosexuality and lesbianism can be seen in short stories and novels by Hanan al-Shaykh, particularly in Women of Sand and Myrrh (Misk al- Ghazal, 1988) as well as in the novels of Ilham Mansur For Hiba (IIa Hiba, 1991), Hiba's Passage through the Flesh (Hiba fi Rihlat al-Jasad, The Sound of the Reed Pipe or The Autobiography of a Place (Sawt al-Nay aw Sirat Makan, 1995). Here the female writer appropriates the male role by writing a daring erotic text, and thus shocking and disturbing by her gender.

Other texts such as Nuha Samara's "Two Faces One Woman" (Al-Tawilat 'Ashat Akthar min Amin, 1981) go into the extreme of representing an emasculated female who forces herself into the male arena, doing what men do, practicing the art of shooting and using a gun, and defiantly cutting off her hair, symbol of her femininity. In this manner the female protagonist experiences the ambiguities of selfhood and gender roles. In other texts like The Stone of Laughter (Hajar al-Dahik, 1990), Huda Barakat presents a feminized man who seeks to recuperate androgyny by opting to live in a protected female inner space doing the chores of a woman or housewife, in a subversive attempt to explore the other by dissolving gender boundaries. In this novel, femininity is presented as the behavioral norm, while masculinity is treated as an ugly aberration showing that men and women alike are victims of gender codes. Other texts portray man as the oppressor and highlight the social and economic advantages which men have over women and the abuses of authority in which they engage especially within the deeply entrenched and almost immutable structures of the family unit. In the first part of Balqis al-Humani's Al-Lija Quarter, we note the traditional binary opposition between the aggressive male and the passive female; however, the roles are reversed half way through the novel, and it is the woman, Fattum, who assumes a dominating and controlling presence by holding the reins and appropriating the role traditionally assigned to man.

Many women writers firmly believe that it is through the medium of language that they can enter the male arena. The fictional works of many women betoken confidence in the written word. Words are tools by which they can understand the world, make sense of history and testify to what one has witnessed. At the same time, some other writers note the

treachery and inadequacy of male language. According to Ghada al-Samman, the patriarchal pen should be stifled and clichés should be discarded The Gray Danube, (Rahil al-Marafi' al-Qadimah, 1973). This strong sense of the inadequacy of language and the way language controls and dominates the life of an individual can be seen in Emily Nasralla's latest novel The Slumbering Ember (Al-Jamr al-Ghafi, 1996). The novel is riddled with proverbs that are used extensively by the inhabitants of Jurat al-Sindyan in order to show the restraining effect of language and culture not only on their speech, but, more significantly, on their very actions and thoughts. In the same manner, the female narrator of The Stone of Laughter employs the language used by men in order to disrupt this language and reveal its shortcomings. Hers is a deliberate and calculated immersion in the patriarchal order to subvert this order. Other writers create utopias that are set against a frustrating and disorienting reality. Among such examples are Nuha Tabbara's "The Deserted Mansion" (Rabi' bila Wurud, 1992) and Nada Amin al-Awar's "The Chamomile Flower" (Laytaha Sabi, 1993). In these works the writers create fantasy worlds to compare with and comment upon the world controlled by men. Other writers employ magic realism to overrun a world based upon fixed and irrefutable assumptions. This can be seen in Najwa Barakat's Decent People on a Bus (Bas al-Awadim, 1996) where a variety of tales and stories are told by different commuters on a bus heading South. The novel challenges the assumptions of realism by emphasizing the importance of subjective narration and personal truths rather than general truth, and in this manner, subjective reality turns out to be no less important than objective reality.

In other works of fiction, the supposed identity and essence of character escapes us. In Suicide of a Dead Man (Intihar Rajul Mayyit, 1970) by Hanan al-Shaykh, we are presented with a ghostly character seen solely from the middle aged man's point of view. The man's obsession with the young woman, Dania, at a critical period in his life drives him to see her strictly from his point of view and define her in relation to his personal, psychological needs. This is a book that interrogates character as the bearer of an essential truth and fixed identity. The interest in character is replaced by shifting, erratic, and fluid inter-relations among shadowy half articulated characters. Similarly, in some short stories by Rene al-Hayek, the characters are hardly recognizable, challenging man's intellectual pretensions to knowledge and expressing skepticism about his ability to understand the world. The past hidden and the future uncertain, these nameless characters immersed in the daily routine of housework feel the emptiness of the present. The story entitled "The Man without his Belongings" (Portrait lil-Nisyan, 1994) highlights causes rather than effects in such a manner that one observes without comprehending, and if the reader fails to understand these characters, it is not because they are intangible or shadowy. If they do not possess a fixed identity, it is because they are more genuine and more true to life. This is a fluid and unstable identity that women who have lived on the margins for so long fully understand and endorse.

There are other works that bare their own devices and incorporate metafictional elements by telling the reader explicitly about the process of writing. Many of these texts are short stories rather than novels. Among such works are "Chez Temporel" by Rafif Fattuh (Tafasil Saghira, 1980), a story told in fragments and from many points of view, "A Subject for a Story" (Hadigat al-Sukhur, 1969) by Salwa Safi and "The Ordeal" (Safinat Hanan ila al-Qamar, 1964) by Layla Baalbakki. At the same time, some of these stories abandon linear plot in favor of cyclical plots that highlight the repetitiveness of a woman's life within the home boundaries as seen in "The Fourth Stage" (Al-Balad al-Ba'id al-ladhi Tuhib, 1962) by Daisy al-Amir where a strong sense of uncertainty prevails. This is the story of a nameless female immersed in the daily routine of housework, living the present and divorced from both past and future. Finally, one could say that some of these works can be described as hybrid texts incorporating dialogues, letters, memoirs, documentary material, and selfconscious comments on the writing process. A good number of texts tend to make use of the memoir more than any other form as seen in The Smothered Echo (Al-Sadā al-Makhnūg, 1986) by Nazek Yared, Beirut 75 (1975) by Ghada al-Samman, The Story of Zahra by Hanan al-Shaykh and many others.

To sum up, the flourishing state and vitality of women's fiction reveals, if anything, woman's ability to find a voice and play an active and positive role. Women writers have used different themes and adopted a variety of techniques to represent themselves, and their voices that have risen out of silence are being heard distinctly.

The file includes a variety of topics ranging from critical studies of single writers, a variety of writers, book reviews, and a short bibliography of selected Lebanese women writers. It is hoped that this file will give the reader a panoramic view of Lebanese and some Arab women's achievement in the field of Literature.

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SUBVERSIVE DISCOURSES IN HANAN AL-SHAYKH:*

PUSHING OUT THE BOUNDARIES OF ARAB FEMINISM IN THE NOVEL

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Surveying women's literature over the past two centuries, gynocriticism¹ has found, perhaps to our surprise, that one of the recurrent themes in the writings of both Third World and Western women has been madness. Time and again, women authors from different periods and literary traditions, with diverse cultural, ideological and epistemic affiliations and commitments, bring out this theme to demonstrate emphatically and unequivocally how the symptoms of psychological disfunctionality, together with definitions of madness, are culture-produced and bound, the products of a virulently hierarchical and patriarchal symbolic order. Despite cultural and partiarchal symbolic order. Despite cultural



foregrounded and articulated by the hitherto silenced women around the world. If not consistently, then very frequently, women writers speak, not "in a different voice" (Gilligan 1982), but in one resonating with the self-same themes and anxieties. As women, this literature, then, is our own, the space in which are deployed all of our contestatory attempts to de-pedestalize the Marys of masculinist culture and imagination, and redeem the Eve-figures long maligned and feared. Notwithstanding its limited capacity to bring about actual change, this discourse is one crucial site of resistance, where stereotypes and myths are demystified and debunked, a necessary step on the road to a meaningful "feminization" of culture.²

Caught between the pedestal and the pit of patriarchy, heroines "crack up" as is witnessed by the many examples with which fiction is fraught.³ "Mad women in the attic" (Gilbert and Gubar), females trapped under a bell jar (Plath), and protagonists exhibiting different forms and degrees of pathological behavior (e.g. Charlotte Perkins Gillman, Simone de Beauvoire, Doris Lessing, Buchi Emecheta, Toni Morrison and Toni Cade Bambara) forcefully throw into relief the theme of madness as elaborated by women. This paper will deal with Hanan Al-Shaykh's creative adaptation of this theme in The Story of Zahra, one of the boldest novels ever penned by an Arab woman.

Granted, this theme is equally present in men's literature, but it usually has an existential, purely "theoretical" dimension often undermined in women's work. In other words, when a male figure "goes mad" in literature, he does so to the degree that he partakes of the "human condition." Conversely, when a woman breaks down, it is largely due,

not only or exclusively to angst, but to gender discrimination which brings forth the kind of social pressures from which men do not suffer, and with which they are unfamiliar. In the masculinist tradition, women and men's experiences are presented as interchangeable, when this is sadly not the case. Female readers are called upon and thought able to identify with the male perspective on alienation, though this perspective can only be one facet of woman's experience of reality (Gilligan 1982). When women write, however, they specifically shed light on those institutions, values and

traditions weighing down on a heroine and stunting her intellectual and emotional growth.⁵ To the extent that it is committed to extra-referentiality, at a time when our century was lauding and promoting autotelic fiction and "art for art's sake," this literature is engaged with questions regarding morality

and ethics, right and wrong, justice and lack thereof.6 Hence its value.7

With this "difference"s in mind, then, we proceed to probe how Hanan Al-Shaykh unravels the theme of Zahra's mental impairment and breakdown in the first part of the novel, only to affirm the protagonist's infinite capacity for self-healing and revitalization in the second. Imagery, symbolism, characterization and events come together to underscore the need for more "room" for women, who, if and when given a space in which to maneuver, can be agents of civilization and peace. What makes The Story of Zahra worthy of our attention here is its thought-provoking treatment of topics at once intense and complex: sexuality and desire, sex and power, sanity and madness, war and peace. All these constitute the background against which the "Othered" Woman is depicted. Thus, in this novel, the Lebanese author contributes to a tradition in women's writing in which the theme of mental impairment undertakes a critique of hegemonic patriarchy, deemed the root cause of the heroine's psychological disintegration as well as social dissolution. The author then takes it upon herself to hail women's great potential and resources, which, once tapped, can effect positive social change. Unfortunately, however, Zahra's attempts at self-liberation and her symbolic efforts to assuage the wounds of her city remain without horizon, as the bullets of patriarchy penetrate her body and fetus, killing any chances for peace.

Two sections of the novel are in a voice other than Zahra's: the third chapter is narrated by Hashem, the protagonist's uncle, a political activist in the Popular Syrian Party (PPS) who had to flee Lebanon in the aftermath of the failed coup which took place on New Year's Eve of 1961-1962, while the fourth one is in Zahra's husband's voice, offering a rather limited and jaundiced perspective on their failed relationship. Al-Shaykh's work is thus predominantly and significantly a first-person narrative. That this mode of narration is chosen to shed more light on the quality of the protagonist's voice and her vision of the world, both of which are important if the reader seeks to understand why she "cracks up" then self-heals, is patent. The novel is structured along bipartite lines: the first segment deals with Zahra on the eve of the war, the second with her attempts to negotiate a relationship with the forces of darkness unleashed by that war in a now eviscerated city.

In the first chapters, we get glimpses of Zahra's torturous relationships with her father and mother from the time she was a small child with severe calcium deficiency through adolescence. Zahra remembers in her first-person narrative how, as a child, she yearned in vain for maternal love and affection, having lost all hope in her belt-wielding father, a harsh man whose only dream was to save enough money to send his son, not daughter, to America to study and become an electrical engineer (p. 20). In her early childhood, her mother was single-mindedly preoccupied with finding ways to escape her husband's yoke, including having an affair, sleeping in a different bed and aborting a set of twins briefly kept in a porcelain soup dish.

In her efforts to critique the Lebanese socio-political order and describe a society in crisis about to explode on the eve of the civil war and during its early stages, Al-Shaykh weaves into the fabric of her novel several leitmotifs and images. Flowers, fruits and trees come to have special significance. Zahra is first of all a "flower" struggling to thrive in an inhospitable environment that defines "sanity" as the degree to which a woman can accommodate herself with. accept and even champion oppressive patriarchal forces. References to figs also recur in the first part of the work: Zahra will not touch figs, a traditional symbol of women's sexuality, because she says: "I am afraid of eye infections, so will not eat figs or even go near a fig tree since I have been told that figs make the eyes go sore "(p. 4, see also p. 28), This rejection of figs encapsulates cultural misgivings regarding feminine desire which, from Zahra's experience of her mother's transgressive sexuality, is dangerous and incurs masculine wrath. She has also assimilated her culture's negative view of women's sexual impulses at once feared and degraded, a traditional misogynistic attitude evoked by the very etymology of the word "hysteria", where hystera, as is commonly known, means uterus. Thus madness and women are intertwined in the patriarchal imagination.

A walnut tree becomes the site of adultery when, rebelling against her brutal husband, Zahra's mother takes on a lover (pp. 6, 28). There the protagonist's first glimpses of mature sexuality, compounded by dread of her father, cause her deadly anguish: she recalls how "I wanted to disappear into the hem of her [mother] dress and become even closer to her than the navel is to the orange," another reference to a fruit(p. 6).10 While women are likened to plant life, suggesting that their assigned role is to vegetate without inner purpose or future, animal imagery is used in Al-Shaykh to represent male characters. Early references to Ahmad, Zahra's brother, associate him with meat, ie. animals, in the context of the mother's preferential treatment: "every evening it was the same. My mother would not give me a single morsel of meat [with the melokhia, or mallow soup]. This she always reserved for Ahmad, sometimes for my father. Her ways never changed. Maybe she never ate chicken or meat herself" (pp. 7-8). These lines are followed by a description of the doting mother "searching carefully for the best piece of meat... here they go into Ahmad's dish. There they rest in Ahmad's belly"(p. 8).11

In the "The Scars of Peace," Zahra recounts how her own face and, more important, her inner psyche become scarred as society was preparing to descend into the inferno of war. On the threshold of adulthood, the father, a "nazi" type (p. 19), rejects Zahra merely because she has acne, a problem that he thinks might make of her a spinster with no marriage prospects. This drives him to beat and abuse her mercilessly every time he sees her fingering her pimples. But this succeeds only in intensifying Zahra's sense of isolation in a world where she feels unwanted and unloved, and to the same degree reinforces the socially constructed notions of beauty and "perfect femininity".

Unable to measure up to this and other such ideals, Zahra

embarks on a process of self-injury, reminiscent of the acts of self-mutilation in Toni Morrison's novels12, all of which are ways of brandishing the female character's rejection of society and its norms; with her nails she intentionally disfigures her face until the blood starts to ooze from her pimples, so much so that the latters became her "only reason for waking each morning. I would hurry to the mirror to inspect in the calm light of day the ravages of the latest onslaught" (p. 19).19 Thus objectified, her face is no longer part of her but is metonymic of society; in aggressing her skin she is, in effect, indirectly repudiating all the unrealistic and procrustean molds in which commodified women are forced to fit. Put differently, investing her action with signification, she is rejecting the criteria by means of which women's worth and "value" are assessed. Later on in the novel she expressly laments the fact that her relatives "cared only about my appearance, and mine had gone to the dogs," for which reason she categorically refuses any interaction with them (p. 109). Zahra's body, then, comes to bear the marks of patriarchy now inscribed on it. Its own wounds are meant to adumbrate those of the city in Part II.

Wherever she finds herself, the bathroom, a crucial leitmotif in the first part of the novel, is her only haven of refuge from society. Indeed, she portrays herself as a prisoner in a succession of bathrooms where she locks herself up in moments of crisis and mental disintegration. Consistently the locus of breakdown, the bathroom expands spatially heralding the mental hospital where "fits" are "controlled" and "health" is "restored" in Beirut and "Africa" (pp. 28-32).

The site of psychosexual release for men, not women, Africa, this amorphous geographic entity, this "other" that has been Lebanized, tamed and conquered (if only by a few "successful" businessmen), becomes after Beirut Zahra's second prison. There too she incarcerates herself in her uncle's then her husband's bathroom, as she used to do in Beirut to escape her father's brutality (p. 19). There she recalls Malek, whose name in Arabic means "possessor", her married colleague in the government tobacco factory with whom she had her first sexual encounter, an ungratifying experience that culminated in two abortions. Memories engender madness and a first bout of fits. Then, when faced with Majed's marriage proposal, she again breaks down, unable to face her husband-to-be with her "condition" as a non-virgin. As she had expected, Majed ("glorious" in Arabic), rebuffs her if only psychologically, and she, feeling betrayed by her uncle, husband and Africa, registers her rejection of matrimony and her African "trap" by "cracking up" again. For, Africa may be a political haven for Hashem and other dissidents, and may represent economic opportunities for youths like Majed, but it is no refuge for women trying to escape their families and injurious past. To women, this Africa without Africans is only a slightly "defamiliarized" Lebanon, since all those patriarchal values whose sole raison-dietre is to oppress the female have been Men, by contrast, set out to transported there intact. dismantle and transcend restrictive racial and sexual taboos, with miscegenation being their most blatant expression of transgressive sexuality.

Turning now to the second part of the novel, entitled "The Torrents of War" we find, perhaps to our amazement, that once back in Beirut, Zahra ceases to experience fits, as if the war had a therapeutic effect on her. Instead she initially falls into severe depression detected in her withdrawal symptoms and over-eating; he also wears her housecoat for two months on end without making any effort to look after her personal needs. In short, she lets herself fall into a state of "dis-ease" or "disrepair," itself a sickness as she admits (p. 109). She spends whole days in bed, refusing to receive visitors whom she accuses of coming "to see my madness ... and laugh at the state I'm in'" (p. 109). Her mother exhorts her to "have pity on [herself], on [her] youthfulness'" (p. 109). Yet, she is oblivious to all these pleas and remains imprisoned in a cocoon of her own making.

What changes her comportment and attitude drastically, however, is the advent of war. After a short period of "indifference," panic overtakes her as she began to follow the news of the war, reading nervously but eagerly between the lines in the newspapers, searching for the truth. Then I would overflow with despair and disbelief. All those figures which listed the numbers killed, could they be possible? Were there truly these kidnappings? Did they actually check your identity card and then, on the basis of your religion, either kill you or set you free? ... Was it true that Rivoli Cinema had been burnt down? Was it true about the fire in the Souk Sursock? And the one in Souk Al-Tawile? Had George, the hairdresser, our neighbour, turned against me? Had I turned against him? (p. 100)

Rather than become shell-shocked amidst the insanity of war, as one might have expected, the thirty-year-old Zahra (p. 132) volunteers, if only for a short time, at a casualty ward, which gives her an insider's look into the gruesome realities of war (p. 115).15 As she seeks the truth and feels the urge to understand the real reasons behind this widespread carnage, war jolts her back to life and forces her to act, even if this act only entails asking the right questions and seeking the right answers. As a consequence of the war too, she and her parents draw closer together for the first time (p. 110), Clutching one another during successive bouts of street fighting, Zahra and her mother recapture their closeness as "orange and navel" (p. 116) after so many years of acrimony. Finally, when the war puts every fact of life into question and endangers every relationship, the mother is forced to reevaluate her rapport with her daughter, who in turn feels the change and exclaims, "[my mother] seemed to realize, for the first time, that I was not a spectre" (p. 110). For the first time as well, the father comes across as a human being, who, cutting across confessional lines and deploring divisiveness. hankers after the peace and tranquillity that now elude his country (p. 110).

It is highly revealing that Zahra, whose breakdowns in PartI used to transform her into a muted being, expresses her anxiety, anger and dismay by "howling" and screaming as explosions burst near-by (p. 120). In unison, she and her mother shout as a newspaper photograph of a whole family killed while playing cards comes back to haunt her. She recalls this moment in these telling words: "I was left completely empty, except for my voice, but even this I could not control any more" (p. 120). Thus, the voice "that could not form a word" (p. 30), that voice that had been silenced by mental breakdown, is restored by war.

To be sure, Al-Shaykh does not mean to depict war in a favorable light, that war that transformed Ahmad from an average, law-abiding middle-class boy whose father wanted to send him to America, into an uncouth, uncivilized militiaman who takes tremendous pleasure in gloating over how his daily activities include raiding people's homes to loot, desecrate and destroy. But what the author succeeds in depicting rather effectively is how the war turns everything topsy turvy, as sectarian, confessional, ethnic and political rifts and fissures inscribe themselves into the social canvas, thereby compromising the very foundations of society. Almost overnight, the father's role at the heart of the family recedes into the background, ceding all its authority to the armed boys-cum-gangsters running amuck on the streets (p. 139). As political hooliganism carries the day, the eclipsed father bows out, disowning this new "wounded" Beirut16 to return with his wife to their ancestral village apparently still untouched by the war, They leave behind the daughter, who in "normal" circumstances would not have been allowed to live on her own. Discarded is the father's leather belt which, Zahra declares, "no longer holds any fears for me. The war has made it powerless" (p. 147).17 This, then, is the real reason why she no longer experiences breakdowns: now that her father has been disarmed and rendered impotent by the war¹⁸, and she has a "house of her own", she is able to channel her energy into mere survival. For war rearranges people's lives canceling individual futures and channeling physical and psychological powers into what amounts to the "art" of bottommost survival. Needless to say, Zahra's need for the bathroom at this point disappears.

Al-Shaykh is intent on showing how war disrupts and topples traditional institutions and dislocates not only people but values. The very suspension of the hitherto entrenched moral order affords Zahra as well as other marginalized figures and groups, some breathing space. In this space, the protagonist's formidable energies are released as she resiliently seeks to affirm a new set of humanistic values with which to combat the law of the jungle, represented by a whole generation of Ahmad's likes. This "code of honor" is best exhibited not only in her deep indignation with her brother19 whose plunder is significantly hidden under the mother's bed, but also in her complex relationship with the sniper. Baffled by the latter, she finds herself using the language of seduction, if not to defeat death then to defer it. She "wondered what could possibly divert the sniper from aiming his rifle and startle him to the point where he might open his mouth instead? Perhaps a troupe of dancers would do it? Or Perhaps a gipsy with a performing monkey? Or perhaps a naked woman, passing across his field of fire? (p. 134)". Walking half naked, then, she decides to titilate this monster of a man, a feeble attempt to distract him from his fatal pursuits. In so doing, she makes it her moral duty to reach out to him and "communicate" sexually and verbally, as if this form of communication could attenuate some of the horrors of war and cleanse the wounds of this disemboweled city.

Though it is beyond our purview to explore the relationship between Zahra and the sniper in any depth, it is crucial to underline that, for the first time in her account, we find her acting on behalf of a clearly formulated and articulated value-system. When she actively seeks out this "monster" with whom she "exchang[es] the language of our bodies" (p. 139), she does so wanting to understand what makes a sniper a sniper, her sense of bewilderment engendering in her the need to ask such questions. This in itself is the meaning she longed to find in her life. An instrument of empowerment, her long aggressed and terrorized body is now deployed creatively in the service of her mind, a first step towards the unification of both mind and body. Effectively, with the unnamed sniper, the heroine experiences the desire and ecstasy that were markedly lacking in her traditional power relationships with "Possessor" and "Glorious".

Walking on deserted streets in the shadow of buildings along treacherous walls, the thunder of artillery reverberating around her, she negotiates a relationship with the forces of danger, evil and barbarism, one in which she sees herself as having the moral upper hand. A new purpose in life is thus forged, at once rejuvenating and meaningful. The trajectory Zahra has defined for herself ultimately restores her peace of mind too, so much so that she, who always takes the initiative in this relationship, contemplates proposing marriage to the sniper (p. 148), the only man who has ever accepted her as she is (p. 138).

To the extent that she seeks to humanize and "re-civilize" the sniper, Zahra is not unlike the prostitute who, at Gilgamesh's prompting, brings Enkidu in touch with civilization for the first time. The sexual act is thus an act of faith in the values of civilization. An advocate of a more humane, less barbaric society, and an emissary of peace, Zahra is momentarily the beautiful, redeeming flower that does not wilt or die. That she is shot at the end is proof enough that war has not made a clean sweep of traditional, patriarchal forces, and that it replicates and legitimates all that oppresses and crushes women. Why else does Al-Shaykh situate the sexual encounters "in the dust of death and ruin" (p. 138) on the stairs of an abandoned building on whose roof the sniper goes about his daily "activities"? That the relationship is destined to remain futureless in this limbo even during the temporary suspension of traditional morality amidst the turbulences of war is corroborated by the annihilation of the unborn baby, the fruit of one woman's act of choice. In this limbo, the logic and discourse of war come to assert the language and practices of patriarchy from which they issue. Zahra herself declares "bullets flew, bombs exploded, smoke rose and bodies bled, but none of it did a thing to touch the decaying regime" (p. 121). Her body riddled with the sniper's bullets, and her voice discomposed, the dying woman is filled with intense foreboding as she sees rainbows "with their promises only of menace" (p. 184). Sadly, the forces of evil have once again proven themselves invincible.

The tragic outcome of the story is perhaps, inevitable. Ever since Zahra comes to identify with the city whose redemption as well as her own she now eagerly seeks, her fate and that of Beirut become entwined. In a rather telling specular relationship, Zahra's hemorrhage towards the end is a microcosm of the macrocosm, an indirect reference to the bloodletting taking place in the protagonist's city and on her own street (p. 164). Beirut at this point is pictured as a city without future, an altar on which all of the secular ideals of the forties and fifties are dealt a decisive blow.20 Small wonder, then, that Zahra and her unborn child would be vanquished by the same patriarchal order that has assassinated the city, together with the notions of tolerance, openness and civility. Yet, Zahra's act on behalf of civilization, albeit ineffectual, amounts to a statement with a humanistic, almost lyrical, dimension.

In The Story of Zahra, the Lebanese author succeeds in pushing back the frontiers of Arab women's feminist discourse by broaching issues long considered taboo, foremost among which is the thorny topic of desire and sexuality. That Al-Shaykh is involved in elaborating an enabling discourse for women, one that is positive and necessary, is clear in Zahra's trajectory from madness, voicelessness and inaction to the determined pursuit of meaningful action and moral engagement, in the name, not of narrow political affiliations, but of basic human decency. In so much as this is the case, this war novel registers women's resolve not to get dragged into this cesspool. It equally brandishes women's rejection of the discourse of war, and that of patriarchy engendering war. Thus, in this work, as in many others written by women, the marginalized female, the woman straight-jacketed by society, casts off her manacles to assert her right to speak out and speak up against the dominant order. Virginia Woolf once defined civilization as "a strip of pavement over the abyss," a fact that Zahra learned all too well...

Notes:

- * Lebanese writer who has written short stories and novels notably The Story of Zahra and Women of Sand myrrh.
- 1. See Showalter's use of the term (1985, 1991).
- 2. The term "feminization" is used to point to all the social and "value" changes whereby domains traditionally viewed as "women's" acquire a "universal" dimension. The concepts of the "new man" and modern "parenting" have been seen as examples of social evolution and instances of feminization.
- **3.** In real life too, more females suffer from psychological disturbances than their numbers in the population warrant. See Dineen for recent statistics (e.g. 210, 1996).



- 4. There are, of course, exceptions. One is J.M. Coetzee's In the Heart of the Country.
- 5. To corroborate this point, one only has to compare and contrast Sartre's and de Beauvoire's very different treatments of existentialism in literature.
- 6. When I first prepared a course on women's literature from around the world (including novelists from Africa, India, Canada, America and the U.K) I never thought that towards the end of that semester, my students and I would discover that not only did these women voice the same concerns, but they even utilized the same images and leitmotifs, irrespective of their cultural background or language. Class discussions helped crystallize my view of this material as a true confluence. Since then, I have had the opportunity to experience this intense literature with my students on successive occasions, and always with the same results.
- 7. In a recent issue of the French Magazine Lire, Helene Cixous was asked about what she considered to be the most important literary "event" in our century. Her outright response was "women!" That their literature has blossomed emphatically and has gained world-wide attention cannot be underestimated. Women are finally able to take part in charting out new directions for literature.
- 8. I use "difference" opting not to enter into the polemical, and, in our opinion, fruitless, though not uninteresting, debate about "ecriture feminine" as proposed by French feminism.
- 9. Zahra means "flower" in Arabic.
- 10. The same image is repeated with reference to how, to continue seeing her lover, the mother had to rely on Zahra, an absent/present female child without whom adultery would have been impossible.
- 11. In Part II, the mother is again shown giving her son, now a war overlord "sporting his combat suit and beard" (111), the lion's share of the meat (118).
- 12. See for example, Sula or Beloved.
- 13. From hereon the pimples become a leitmotif in the novel.
- 14. Two prominent Lebanese psychiatrists Leyla Farhood and Elie Karam here have shown in their respective research how prevalent such cases of depression were during the war. 15. I take issue with Accad's assessment of this novel as a seamless account of "violence, madness, and destruction" (1990, 58). From the perspective of the ending, Zahra, in Part II, certainly falls victim once again to patriarchy. However, Accad does not see in Zahra's madness then selfhealing, instances of resistance to, and subversion of, the discourse of war that this critic very ably depicts. This is, I think, a very crucial and hopeful aspect of this narrative.
- 16. I owe this appelation to my colleague Mona Amyuni.
- 17. Later on, she dissects her past, commenting that "[i]t was always my fear of people which put me into a pathetic state, but that fear had evaporated with the war" (158).
- 18. The text abounds with references to the weakened father, and father-figure. Here is one example: trying to convince his son to abandon his militia, the father "could hardly speak for weakness as his head went on shaking" (118).
- 19. This is best demonstrated on p. 140 where Ahmad's

unabashed sexual behavior highlights to Zahra the extent to which war has changed people and mores.

20. These are amply described in Chapter III, where Hashem recalls his political involvement in the Popular Syrian Party, a non-sectarian secularist movement.

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MOTHERHOOD THE DOUBLE TABOO

Aida al-Jawhari, Ph.D. Translated by Myriam Sfeir

ike absolute truth, motherhood is a mode of behaviour that encompasses positive sentiments: love, affection, tenderness, sacrifice, self denial, happiness, and altruism. Most texts glorify this feeling and overlook the more practical occupational role. Motherhood is an abstraction, an exalted act of giving, where the actual reality of the giver is neglected, and her desires, pleasures, and energies, are overlooked and ignored. Social practices, customs, and traditions do not tolerate women whose maternal role fails to conform to the norm, and such mothers are viewed as wicked and selfish.

The Mother in the Arabic Novel

The mother in the Arab world lives in a state of emotional drainage and daily subjugation despite ready made images of successful familial experiences. In controlling the future and destiny of her male and female children, she is viewed either as Virgin Mother or as a Medea.

The Virgin Mother

Mary is the self-sacrificing pure mother who devotes her life to raising and protecting her son. She gives birth without "sin", pleasure, and even without pain. Sarjun the Acadian king (2800 BC) did not know who his father was, but he claimed that his mother was one of the virgins of the temple. The pharoes believed that the mother of the "Pharoe" gives birth to him through asexual intercourse, an unnatural act on the part of the gods. She is, therefore, an ethereal and holy creature who has transcended her own body.

Arabic literary texts celebrate the virgin image of the mother. In these texts the mother is the victim, while the father is the strict executioner. Moroccan male novelists have succeeded in following this trend. Idris Shuraybi was the first to adopt such an endeavor in **The Simple Past** (*Le Passé Simple*, 1954) followed by Rashid Abu Jadra in **The Repudiation** (*La Répudiation*, 1969), Tahir Bin Jallun in **The Down Cast Eyes** (*Les Yeux Baissés*, 1994), Tahir Wattar in The Ace (*L'as*, 1974), and Muhamad Dhayb who writes in **The King's Dance** (*Raqṣat al-Malik*, 1968) that "our fathers are the ones who impregnate our mothers." Perhaps the harshest of these testimonies can be found in **The Plain Bread** (*Al-Khubz al-Ḥafī*, 1992) by the Moroccan writer Muhamad Shukri, where the mother is crushed, annihilated, and eliminated, while the father in a state of rage kills one of his children.

A mother's attachment to her male children is not unilateral because her son reciprocates this same infatuation. In Abu Jadra's novel, the mother's absence yields sorrow and grief: the main character goes mad, suffers from a breakdown, and contemplates suicide. Moreover, the hero in Tahir Wattar's novel is rendered insane and mute upon losing his mother. Female writers also deal with the nurturing mother (as opposed to the ravenous, predatory father), yet with less determination and insistance. Hanan al-Shaykh in her novel The Story of Zahrah (Hikayat Zahrah, 1980) recounts: "At that point my father's image came into my mind, shrunken, lacking the Hitlerlike moustache and with no watch in his trouser pocket. By now his heavy frame had lost all sign of the brute strength*with which he had beaten my mother" (p.130). Fleeing her father's violence and tyranny, Zahrah becomes attached to her mother and compares their closeness to "an orange and her navel." At the same time, Zahrah is conscious of her mother's preference and singling out of her brother Ahmad: "My mother would never give me a single morsel of meat. This she always reserved for Ahmad, sometimes for my father. Her ways never changed. Maybe she never ate chicken or meat herself' (p.7).

In her novel **The Excised** (*L'exicés*, 1982) Evelyne Accad refers to the subjugated, conciliatory, and subdued mother who is powerless and weak before the tyrannical father who locks his daughter up because she had the audacity to fall in love with someone from a different religious background. This subjugated mother has no weapons but her tears to fight the father's oppression with.

The Radical Mary

This "virgin mother" protects the male and pities the female. Her identification with her son is so intense that it comes close to desire. This is what Hasan Bu Hadibah, the Tunisian sociologist, asserts in Sexuality in Islam (Al-Jins fi al-Islam) where he says that mothers in the Arab world become attached to their male children in an attempt to compensate for their emotional and spiritual deficiency. Such a relationship is. in his view, a perversion that features in many novels. The Lebanese novelist Evelyne Bustrus recounts in her novel "Under the Branch of a Nut Tree" (Sous La Baguette du Coudrier, 1988) the story of a mother whose infatuation with her son causes her to fall in love with a young man as old as he is. When her relationship is exposed and everyone finds out about it, she pushes her brother to kill her in order to preserve the honor of the family and to spare her son direct involvement in this problem. In A Letter after Death (Risalah ma ba'da al-Mawt, 1989) by Dominique Iddeh, the male protagonist looks upon his father with suspicion and misgiving and rejects marriage totally in order not to hurt his enamored mother's feelings. A mother's identification with her son reaches its peak in Tufig Yussuf 'Awad's collection of short stories A Shirt of Wool (Qamis al-Suf, 1957) where the mother's desire to monopolize and possess her son causes her illness, depression

and hallucination. The seriousness of her condition leaves no room for any form of sublimation: "Amin was fixing his tie when she dragged him to her room and closed the door, looking around like a thief. She embraced him passionately and released him gazing at his forehead, eyes, hair. Then she stretched out her hand to caress his chest. Once more she sprung on him and kissed him, hugged him..." (p. 14) In the two novels by Dominique Iddeh and Tufiq Yussuf Awad, the father is practically non-existent. In the first novel he is hardly a tangible figure, while in the second he is deceased though with a long history of tyranny and oppression.

In her analytical presentation of Mrs. Marie Rose (Sitt Marie Rose, 1982), Etel Adnan links the behaviour of pampered male children to violence, wars, and rejection of the other "because Arab mothers love their children only" (p. 78), and because "true love means loving a stranger." (p.78)

(Même les Tueurs ont une Mère), the French writer Patrick Minies refers to the pressure of a mother's and presence domination. Does Marwan, the main protagonist in the novel, fight to please his mother and protect her, or to her power break control?

The Medea

Medea is the fictitious evil witch who killed her children because her husband Jason prefers another woman to her. As far as Medea is concerned children are no more than objects, or tools exchanged between two partners. Once her partner neglects her, she lets out her rage and anger on their children. In the texts examined, the castrating mother, as she is referred to in psychoanalysis, appears in a bashful and diffident manner. The wicked mother is generally the father's Cinderella's wife. stepmother. Muhamad Abi Samra, the Lebanese novelist, resists this convention in The Earlier

Man (Al-Rajul al-Sabiq, 1995) and presents a mother who refuses to acknowledge her children. She is contemptuous of her situation and is disgusted with the idea that "a man defiled her slim body with intercourse." She despises her husband, wrecks the life of her children, and converts their life into a disaster and a perpetual feeling of inadequacy. In As Green as Marshes (Khadra' kal-Mustanga 'at, 1992) by Hani al-Rahib, the mother dominates her daughter, ensnares her, and gives her orders and warnings. As a result, the daughter sees her mother as the cause of all her problems: "My mother was nothing but a besieging torture to my body and soul. She not only opposed my every movement,



in order to block any chances for committing 'sin.' Besides, she constantly nagged about my going to the river or playing in the neighborhood. This was a shameful act and an unforgivable crime."

In a derisive tone, Mona Shatilla in her novel The Losers (Al-Kha'ibun, 1996), presents a negligent mother. The protagonist, a writer who is far from being an ordinary woman, worries about and concentrates upon her artistic profession, ignoring her daughter who eventually ruins her academic and professional career by becoming a drug addict. In Mary the Light (Maryam al-Nūr, 1995) Raja' Nihmi's main character does not fully accept her daughter because she is ugly, and the daughter reacts: "How can a mother see her daughter's ugliness ... Is she worthy of being a mother?" If the mother in The Excised supports her daughter against the father's obstinacy, other women participate in the circumcision of their daughters without batting an eye. (pp. 120-121) In The Cedar's Memory (La Mémoire du Cèdres, 1989), Jan dismisses all her familial obligations and disregards her children for the sake of her lover Faris. Also in The Nobleman's Wife (La Femme du noble, 1992), Flora the protagonist wrecks her marriage by deserting her loving husband and adolescent children and running off with her lover who belongs to the nobility and who neglects her in favor of his younger wives. As the story unfolds, the negative consequences of her decision become apparent. This novel portrays the baneful effects of the father's absence as well as the women's instinctual nature manifested in her indulgence in the gratification of her desires irrespective of the consequences.

Conclusion

Although the texts mentioned above do not represent all aspects of motherhood, one can draw the following conclusions:

1. Unlike the general discourse on motherhood, maternal love is not a stable and definite given. Motherhood is not an inherent and deep-seated instinct for it is affected by external variables. Not all mothers share the same maternal love, and each case varies according to the individual and the situation. In this sense, one could say that the state of motherhood is conditional since it depends on various factors such as a woman's relationship to her partner, child bearing, conception, natural inclinations, the mother's acceptance of the child's outward appearance and sex, her personal and professional comportment and demeanor, as well as her social status. In the Moroccan novels referred to and the novels by Tufiq Yusuf 'Awad and Evelyne Bustrus respectively, mothers become attached to their sons in order to fill an emotional gap, and this passionate attachment turns the woman into a possessive, untamable and destructive creature. In The Story of Zahrah and The Exised the mother is a shield used by the protagonist/ daughter to protect her from the tyranny of the father. Also in The Earlier Man, the mother refuses to accept her miserable situation and rejects her child (even though he is a boy) because he is tiny and ugly. In Mary the Light the mother rejects her daughter because she is ugly, and in The Losers, the daughter is neglected and sacrificed for the sake of her mother's own personal ambition. In **As Green as Marshes**, the mother oppresses her daughter in order to propagate and promote conventional patriarchal values. Similarly, in **The Exised**, mothers find pleasure in the bloody scene of their daughters' circumcision. In **The Thirty-Three Year Old Woman** (*Imra'at al-Thalathin* 'aman), the mother ignores her daughter because she is the fruit of an unwanted marriage.

2. The novels written in French such as The Nobleman's Wife, The Cedar's Memory concentrate on the mother's desires and needs rather than on her maternal obligations and familial commitment. This might be attributed to the fact that the Lebanese war contributed to the surfacing of women's needs and desires and brought them back to whatever is primitive and primary.

3. The Medea mother (with the exception of The Cedar's Memory) is accused and proclaimed guilty of neglecting her children. In As Green as Marshes, the emotional commitments of the protagonist never last owing to her traditional upbringing; however, only Jan in The Cedar's Memory escapes condemnation. Her father understands and supports her decision, and her husband merely complains when she leaves him and flees to her lover. So it is apparent that children are the external symbols exhibiting the feelings present between a man and a woman. They are also representations of how women view themselves, their bodies, and their realities.

4. The "virgin mother" as well as the wicked mother feature more in men's writings. Why is this the case? Is it because of men's high expectations and strong identification with and attachment to their mothers? Or is it because mothers are more attached to their male offspring? More than anything else, these texts enable us to understand in more depth the complexity of motherhood and the relationship between mother and child.

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ETEL ADNAN THE SECRET OF BEING A WOMAN *

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read Etel Adnan. I meet her sometimes in Beirut. I try all the time to perceive the kind of writer she is, the woman she is. She tells us that her books are the houses she builds for herself, that she settles nowhere, that she lives all over the world in newspapers, railway stations, cafés, airports. Feeling different early in life she writes: "Memories are as fresh as cool water and a cool breeze floats over one's fever".

Her memories take her back to her childhood in Beirut where she lived in an "old big house, with huge windows, lace curtains and a flowerstand painted in green". She remembers Beirut as a magical place flooded all over with light. Her mother was a Christian Greek from Smyrna, her father a Muslim Syrian from Damascus. He belonged to a family where the men served in the Army of the Ottoman Empire. They settled in Beirut at the end of World War I and Etel was born in 1925. Lebanon was a French mandate and French schools multiplied then. Arabic was forbidden in these schools and Etel spoke French as a child. She said later in an interview that she could only express herself in Arabic through painting. Educated in a strict nun's school, she felt that dogmatism occupied the totality of her mental space. She grew up thinking the whole world was like a boy and to wear a boy's hair cut, with her hair cut very short à la garçon, in the latest Parisian fashion. Her mother decided, as well, to have her baptized, while she discovered, simultaneously, the East through her frequent visits to Damascus with her father. They stayed with relatives and she delighted in the discovery of this different world with Muslim feasts, dinners on huge copper trays put on rugs, mounts of delicious sweets brought in from the market by boys carrying them on their heads. In brief, Damascus was the East with all its splendor. There she was a child of city Arabs mixed with Turkish blood and culture, at the door of the Islamic world:

Thus I got used to standing between situations, to being a bit marginal and still a native, to getting acquainted with notions of truth which were relative and changed like the hours of the days and the passing seasons.

Would this "standing between situations" be the basis for Etel's inner freedom, a freedom one feels in all that she writes? This question will be entertained throughout our quest for Etel's identity as woman and writer, and for her own approach to feminism.

Later, Etel works for a living in Beirut and continues her higher education in Beirut, Paris, and the United States where she has been living for very long. Thus, she writes poetry, novels, essays, literary criticism, articles for journals and newspapers in French as well as in English. She also paints. She is unquestionably, an Arab writer as Ammiel AlCalay



Japanese paper. Etel Adnan

she a Lebanese writer, a French writer, an American writer, a woman writer?

I would answer on Adnan's behalf that she is all these. Her multiple facets enrich her personality and writings, and make any categorization impossible.

Asked by her friend Fawwaz Taraboulsi to contribute an essay for a special issue on Arab Women to appear in the journal Zawaya, Adnan sends him a series of letters, composed over two years, during peregrinations from city to city in the world at large. The letters are later published under the title Of Cities and Women (letters to Fawwaz).

In this collection of letters, Etel Adnan hunts, with a marvelous sense of humor, for the secret of being a woman. She looks for this secret in the specific atmosphere she finds in the cities she visits. She also identifies city and woman in the wake of world artists who have done the same since atavistic times. Adnan allows herself, as well, free rein while she vibrates with each city she visits. She opens up fully to the manifold spectacles cities offer her, and lives deeply each single experience.

Adnan, thus, walks in Barcelona, looks at women, and marvels at the freedom and harmony they seem to live inwardly and with the world around them. In Marrakech or Beirut, she reflects, women carry malaise in their gait, divisions of all sorts in their looks. In Barcelona, women appear to have control over their bodies and their movements. They make you feel they are whole, that there is unity in their persons, a unity between minds and lives. Adnan immediately universalizes this impression:

They remind me that it is interesting to be alive, to be a human being, and to be part of a precise moment in time and space, that theories get lost when confronted with privileged experience.

The girl who refused dogmatism while growing up would reject all along any sexist categorization, any preconceived theories. Indeed, woman and man are human beings and live specific experiences that make them what they are at a precise juncture in history.

Lived experiences are what basically interest our author who insists by saying a little later:

I've known for a long time that theories must never let go of experience ... it is in women's experience that we might find some general ideas on their condition ... by establishing relationships, all sorts of relationships.

In fact she explores all kinds of relationships between cities, places, streets, people, painting, singing, dancing, to come closer to her quest, for "knowledge acquired by experience goes directly to the heart, to the truth of the matter."

Woman is the keeper of memory and of origins. Grandeur is in the memory, in the belonging, in pride, the grandeur of primordial things: the ocean, everyday life, a table, fruits, a

woman. It should be so simple to think about woman! What is woman's "problem" therefore?

Of course, it's a problem of liberty, Adnan answers herself. It's personal, it's social, a secret problem, a problem of society. But it shouldn't be a problem, she adds, for inner liberty doesn't wait for institutions, "freedom is a state of mind". She illustrates her real meaning by taking the example of Ferdaous, a woman the eminent Egyptian feminist Nawal Saadaoui met in prison in Cairo, and interviewed several times. Saadaoui collected the interviews in a book entitled Ferdaous where she says that the woman was condemned to death for having killed a savage pimp. When President Sadat heard of the case, he said he would free the woman if she pleaded her own case. The woman refused for she did not want to owe her life to Power.

Adnan gives other examples of freedom as she conceives it, walking into the streets of Barcelona. A poor, fat old woman sings a flamenco, real, authentic, beautiful. Men and women form a circle around her, rich and poor, young and old, listening to the best voice in town. Two or three poorly dressed women start to dance, the crowd is intensely present and happy. The evening stretches on capturing a variety of emotions. Adnan suddenly realizes that in an Arab city, in Beirut for example, men would have made fun of these old and ugly women who sang and danced:

Men from our country do not accept women who express themselves with their body in public ... Here, on this avenue, the women didn't have to be considered "beautiful" to dance in the street. They were respected ... They were free.

Respect, freedom, harmony with self and world, those are the values erected at every turn Adnan takes in her voyage, in quest for the feminine, but essentially for the human.

The search for woman is, in fact, one for man and woman. The "secret" is revealed to be about human beings at large, and world civilizations. Women's liberation is a function of the liberties granted by the societies in which they live, and granted equally to all human beings.

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SAHAR KHALIFEH A PALESTINIAN NOVELIST

Ghena Ismail

Sahar Khalifeh was born to a conservative Palestinian family of eight girls and one boy. After the death of her two sisters in their childhood, she heard comments of relief among the women in the family that "the burden had eased." Khalifeh's adolescence was a very critical and intense period. She read, painted, danced, sang, and vividly expressed her emotions which worried her mother who eventually sent her to a nun's boarding school. Ever since Khalifeh was a child, teachers and nuns always expected her to

become a writer or artist. However, she, like most women in Palestine then, was deprived of the opportunity to develop her skills since there were no universities in the country then. "To join a university, meant that a woman had to travel which was considered a social taboo." Remarks such as "Death would come first" were the words she heard from her parents whenever she voiced her desire to become an artist or a writer.

The moment Khalifeh graduated from school, the "bridegroom was waiting for her." She told her parents that marriage was not among her plans at that stage because she wanted to pursue her

education; however, their reply was that they would rather "bury her" than have her voice such opinions. At eighteen Khalifeh found herself entrapped in a marriage which she described later as a "nightmare". Her husband, an addicted gambler, was very different from her in character. thought. and emotion. Whenever Khalifeh wrote, she was confronted with her husband's violent reaction. "He tore my paintings and writings, but this did not stop me. I continued to write in his absence while my daughter kept watch." In the beginning, writing for Khalifeh was a means of escape from the misery she was living in: "When I wrote, I let free reign to my emotions and did not feel restricted in any way."

Khalifeh had written several short poems before she decided to focus on novel writing. The manuscript of her first novel, **After the Defeat**, (*Ba'da al-Hazīmah*), based on her own experience as a Palestinian and a woman in the occupied territories, was confiscated at the bridge that divides Jordan from the West bank.

Her second novel, We Are No Longer Your Slaves, marked a transition from marital life to a new career. Acceptance of the novel for publication by Dar al-Ma'aref was a ray of hope amidst a world of despair that was about to lead her to suicide. Khalifeh clung to this hope and nourished it until she was eventually able to take the final decision of divorce. She found no difficulty getting the divorce since she had al-'iṣmah (i.e. the legal right to divorce). For her, these experiences aroused many questions regarding other women who desperately

want to divorce their husbands, but are hindered by innumerable legal obstacles.

Having a clear vision of what she wanted, Khalifeh enrolled in the English Department at Bir Zeit University. "Right from the beginning, I knew what I wanted - to become a writer who has a fixed income." After graduating with a B.A degree in English in 1977, Khalifeh worked as a supervisor of media affairs at Bir Zeit University and began collecting information for her next novel.

In her novels, we note a marked development in the role and status of women. Whereas, in her early writings, Khalifeh portrays the oppressed and passive type of woman, the liberal and assertive woman dominates her later novels, showing the development of Khalifeh's own feminist awareness.

In We Are No Longer Your Slaves, the women depicted are rebellious and aspire for liberation, but they lack a welldeveloped feminist awareness: "In the beginning, I wrote from the point of view of a woman whose experience did not go beyond the walls of her home." Even in the next novel Wild Thorns the only woman character is marginal, and her liberation comes through her brother. Does Khalifeh intend to imply then that woman's liberation could only be achieved through men? Khalifeh explains that she wrote this novel at a stage when she wanted to prove that she could be as involved in nationalistic issues as any man was: "My attention, then, was directed towards men, for I worked in factories side by side with men and hardly saw any women there." Sunflower a live account of the involvement of women in the "cause", marks a turning point in Khalifeh's writing: "My feminist awareness started to develop when I was writing Sunflower."

In her most recent novel, The Inheritance, Khalifeh narrates the story of a woman who comes back from New York to the West Bank in search of her roots and culture which she heard much about through her father's memories and nostalgic tears. The heroine comes to Wadi Al-Rayhan, a traditional Arab city, looking for generosity and compassion, but finds instead conflict and exploitation among members of the same family. In place of the materialistic western society, she finds a complicated and unhealthy socio-political reality. Unlike her previous novels that ended in a hopeful note, Khalifeh ends The Inheritance with a question.

For Khalifeh, feminism means justice, a revolt against old practices. It bridges gaps, mends them, and tries to understand them. Khalifeh has a very clear stand on feminist writing. The author stated, in a powerful speech on feminist writing, which she delivered at the Lebanese American University last year on the occasion of the International Women's Day, that time and again we have been asked whether feminist writing existed, and that very often our answers have been "evasive, apologetic, twisted, hidden, ambiguous, and dishonest." She concluded by asserting that "feminist writing of course exists to those who are sensitive to women's sufferings, to those who are not afraid, to those who do not hesitate to hold the candle in the street, in darkness, and in the pathways of the people of the cave."

According to Khalifeh, the major obstacles facing her today as a writer are those imposed by the Arab regimes. "We had a misconception that the Palestinians will create a democratic system different from the existing other Arab regimes; however, the Palestinian system has proved to be one of the worst." Khalifeh's greatest aspiration is to continue writing despite all barriers.



IDENTIFICATION CARD

- · Born in Nablus, Palestine in April, 1941.
- . Holds a Ph.D. in the Modern Novel from the USA.
- · Member of the International Book Program.
- · Author of the following novels:

We Are No Longer Your Slaves. Lam Na'ud Jawari Lakum. Beirut: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1974.

Wild Thorns. (Al-Sabbar). Beirut: Dar al-Adab, new ed. Wild Thorns. - Trans. by Trevor Le Gassick and Elizabeth Fernea. London: Al Saqi Books, 1985.

Sunflower, 'Abbad al-Shams, Beirut: The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), 1980.

Diary of an Unrealistic Woman. Mudhakkarat Imra'ah Ghayr Waqi 'iyyah. Beirut: Dar al-'Adab, 1986.

The Door of the Courtyard. (Bab al-Sahah) Beirut: Dar al-'Adab, 1990.

The Inheritance. (Al-Mirath), Beirut: Dar al-'Adab, 1997.

ABSTRACTS OF THREE INTRODUCTORY STUDIES TO A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS WRITTEN BY WOMEN SINCE 1960

The Presentation Of Reality in Short Stories Written By Lebanese Women

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This study deals with the short story as a genre that has attracted a surprisingly large number of women writers since the 1960's. Even though women writers wrote without strong orientations and direction, the stories, on the whole, have insisted on a realistic shape.

Keeping in mind the elasticity of the word realism, the study deals with various modes and shapes of realism ranging from depictions of tangible reality and particular events, accurate observation of empirical phenomena, exposition of social injustice, concern with documentation, and conveyance of a message. The stories pay more attention to the visible rather than the invisible and represent reality as intelligible and as making sense. At the same time, in addition to a direct and uncomplicated reporting of the truth of everyday life, the study reveals a more differentiated understanding of the writers' partial relationship to the world, ontological uncertainties, and the problems and constraints involved in trying to depict reality. If these texts reveal the impossibility of depicting reality as it is, they show, at the same time, the subtleties and contradictions of realism. In fact, some of these stories reveal a slight shift in focus from the stable, the balanced, and the harmonious, to the random, the shifting, and the changing :

However, despite some moves toward experimentation, the Lebanese short story remains traditional, and the subjects remain anchored securely in time and place. One could say that these stories generally fit into the category of the well - made, that is they have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Even when they depart into areas of modern uncertainty, or when they overlook part of the beginning, the middle, or end, they are still in line with traditional fiction.

Explicit references to reality occur in many of the actual works and continue until the 1990's. Referring to real places is one way of mirroring reality and giving the illusion that what is portrayed is the real world. This is seen in the incorporation of real places into the texts. Among such places are Beirut, Damascus, Morocco, London, Paris, Yemen, the Intercontinental Hotel, the Horseshoe and many others. In addition to places, some writers, such as Daisy al-Amir, stress their relatedness to objects and things in their immediate surroundings, particularly in the home plot. In

some texts, objects begin to assume human forms, subverting and overpowering the human animate world. Some other stories incorporate semi documentary material and remain close to journalistic writing as we see in stories by Nur Salman. This is a more heightened form of realism which can be largely attributed to the civil war in Lebanon.

Another technique employed is the achievement of authenticity not through adherence to physical and tangible reality, but in the emphasis, not so much on the external world, but rather on what this world represents. In other words, a place like Beirut becomes a set of signs, a text to interpret, and the writer or narrator reads meaning into it. This is seen in the stories of a vast majority of writers from the sixties to the nineties.

Another form of adherence to reality is through the emphasis on the body. The female body emerges in these texts tinged with the hue of eroticism. The texts reveal the woman's awareness of her body, her desire for liberation through sexual freedom and the right to choose the man she loves, and to express her physical and sexual needs. This can be seen in the writings of the sixties and early seventies; however, this tendency almost disappeared in the 80s because of the prioritizing of the political and military problems, but reappeared again in the nineties with greater intensity in the short stories of Hanan al-Shaykh. Al-Shaykh uses language and themes that had not been tackled before such as themes of homosexuality. By choosing such topics that are normally associated with male authors, the writer transgresses and disturbs by her gender.

If realism may have been the predominant mode of portrayal for women, other writers employ strategies that run counter to realism and undermine conventional notions of reality by blurring the boundaries between the real and the imaginary. Such strategies can be seen in some stories by Layla Ba'albaki, and Salwa Safi. These stories bare their own devices and incorporate metafictional elements by telling the reader explicitly about the actual process of writing. Other stories, like some of those written by Rafif Fattuh, have no beginning and seem to end in the middle.

Another strategy includes the use of elements of the fantastic that do not destroy realism but reveal a slow shift away from it. The creation of such fantasy worlds is a form of heightened realism where such worlds are created to comment upon the real world and show its limitations. Among the stories that highlight this mode are those written by Nuha Tabbara Hammud, Emily Nassrallah, and Nada Amin al-A 'war.

Other stories such as those by Rene al-Hayek employ interior monologue or dialogue which highlights the subjective nature of the material presented and creates the impression of an autonomous narration. In these stories, the emphasis is on character rather than plot and atmosphere rather than action.

In the light of the above, one could say that the stories written by women represent an authentic female voice and portray an authentic female experience. The stories maintain a very strong tie with reality no matter how they have tried to soar above or beyond it. Despite the fact that some writers disrupt linear plot, abandon sequential plotting and causality, and flaunt their presence foregrounding the subjective nature of their narration, there is a continuing belief in the meaningfulness of language and the written word. Despite some questioning of the assumptions of realism, these writers, by and large, aspire to depict the world in which they live using authentic and documentary material such as journals, newspapers, diaries, and letters in an attempt to get at reality. Thus, one could say that although fiction written by women from 1960 to the present demonstrates a variety of experiences and stylistic approaches, it has maintained its strong ties with the outside world and has remained committed to the realistic mode.

Novels Written by Lebanese Women From 1960-1997

By Rachid Al-Daif

The study attempts to shed light on two major issues related to the fiction written by Lebanese women since the early 1960's until the present: the trends to which the novel belonged, and the particular attributes of subject matter and goals.

The fiction written by women cannot be categorized under any distinct trend or particular school or movement. It has remained within the mainstream of the Arabic novel and has fallen under the same influences. The sixties that witnessed the rise of existentialist trends in the Arabic novel, including novels written by women, dominated the scene and almost did away with other modes of writing. Still these other modes - including Romanticism and Realism - managed to hold out and continued to develop. The realistic mode, in particular, flourished and developed to reach its peak after the 1967 defeat which led to a serious shift in Arab life in general and literature and the novel in particular. This date in effect marks the end of the existentialist era in the Arabic novel. Then came the Lebanese war which left its imprint on the fiction written by women. Accordingly, we note a substantial number of works that reveal a strong tendency to use documentary material.

If the fiction written by women writers falls within the mainstream of the Arabic novel in general and expresses the general spirit of the age, that does not imply that these works have no particular and individualistic traits that distinguish them from works written by male writers. Male literature, in general, and particularly the novel, transformed women into a rhetorical expression or cliche'. No wonder that women have concentrated in their writing on the various problems afflicting women particularly issues related to morality and the relationship with men.

These problems can be generally attributed to two main factors: customs and traditions and the prevalent ethical and moral norms. In both cases, the cause of women's suffering seems to be determined by an external factor, the society in which one lives rather than existence itself, women's nature, or psyche etc. Accordingly, one could say that some women were generally in a state of rejection of the prevalent ethical and moral standards, while others went as far as abandoning constraint and calling for unconditional freedom. A third party, unlike the other two, regarded women as human beings no more no less, and therefore, did not devote a great deal of attention to women's issues, nor did they see their problems as distinctly and particularly feminine to be dealt with separately and apart from other issues.

The study concludes with a question. What are the reasons that prevented this highly significant fiction written by women, particularly in the 1960's, from featuring in the mass media, academic and literary magazines, cultural clubs and universities?

Translated by Samira Aghacy

Lebanese Women Poets

Sabah al-Kharrat Zwein

Poetry is an attempt to enter the world of writing. It is an adventure in the unknown in quest of the absolute; it is a voyage of doubt into search of peace. The poet is not merely a medium for conveying feelings. His or her mission is to generate, explore, and create language. His or her ultimate goal is the absolute. Doubt and certainty alternate in the process of writing poetry, drowning the poet in a world of contradictions and impossibilities which he or she tries to surpass through writing. The poet, however, cannot write a single word without finding the structure or form. Form comes before content because it is form that extracts the secret from the depths of the poet. Form is writing. It is the creative process.

This study is restricted to three Lebanese women poets: Nadia Tueini, Vinus Khouri-Gatta and Nuhad Salameh. Other poets like Etel Adnan, Claire Jubeili, Huda Adeeb, Andreé Shedeed, May El-Murr, Inaya Jaber, Nada El-Haj and Maha Sultan are only touched upon or referred to briefly.

Nadia Tueini is a well known voice in the world of poetry the voice of words that reflects a sharp and spontaneous



"Narration in the Course of its Form", 1993. Maisoon Sagr al-Qasimi

vision. Nadia Tueini's words emerge from the depth of her soul taking the shape of water circles on the surface of a stagnant lake. We can see them but without being able to capture them at the moment of their occurrence. Nadia Tueini uses the four elements of creation *i.e.* water, fire, earth and air. However, no matter how hard we try to talk about each of these symbols in isolation, the four elements remain endlessly inter-related and endlessly rich. Nadia Tueini asserts that poetry is the savior from the ugliness of reality as it helps uncover the secrets lying within one's soul.

Another distinctive poet is Vinus Khouri-Gatta, the poet of "death", since she never writes about anything but death, but when she writes about death, she is in the peak of life and imaginative Khouri-Gatta's power. flexible, passionate, and sophisticated language attracts us to her world revolves everlastingly around the one and only topic, death. the poet's inexhaustible subject. Khouri Gatta's language is liberated from the cold mind's surveillance. Her poems are composed in moments of extreme passion hallucination. By naming death, describing it, and liberating it from silence, the poet breaks the mystery of her existence to show that she can escape extinction if she actually confronts it with ferocity and aggressiveness.

Nuhad Salameh entraps the reader in entangled and ambiguous images. The reader cannot easily comprehend Salameh's symbolic language. He or she will have to reread and re-think her verses several times in order to be able to relate to them. Composing poetry is circular, and Nuhad Salameh kept

revolving around herself until her dream proved unattainable. Eventually the dream turned into a nightmare, salvation appeared far-fetched, and the "city" for which she was looking became "alien" to her. Salameh's anxiety is directly related to her personal understanding of the "city" which may be the promised land, the perfect city, or the golden place.

Translated by Ghena Ismail

HAYY AL-LIJĀ



Saleh Ibrahim, Lebanese University

ayy al-Lijā, a novel written by Balqis al-Humani and published in 1969, presents the life style of a poor segment of the Lebanese society. While portraying the life and daily practices of this particular group of people, it tracks the social progress and change that took place along a span of time stretching immediately before World War I until the period following World War II.

This is a novel about a group of Shiite Lebanese people

who move from their villages in the South of Lebanon and settle in Ḥayy al-Lijā, a Shiite ghetto in Beirut, where they attempt to uphold their traditions and customs and pretend that nothing has changed and that life is the same as it was in their villages. The changes that occur are primarily visible in Fattum the main character in the novel. The novel traces the story of Fattum from the time when she marries her cousin,¹ at the age of 14, moves from a village in South Lebanon to Beirut, and eventually returns as an old woman to her village where she intends to spend the rest of her days (p. 7). Fattum never loved her husband for he was rude, rough and uncouth. He insulted

and abused her for trivial reasons, or for no reason at all, and constantly made fun of her tall and slender body comparing her to a "tall reed" (p.9). Fattum knew all along that her husband did not love her. He used to come home at sunset to change his clothes and eat his supper before going out again without informing her of his whereabouts. He always returned home late after Fattum was sound asleep (p. 24). For her husband, marriage was no more than a shelter to spend the night, and a place where service is always available free of charge (p.3).

Fattum never benefited from their constantly improving economic situation. When her husband began earning more money, she heard of the improvement from others. She continued to live in her shabby room since her husband preferred to spend his money on other women, and beat his wife and insult her for the most trivial reasons (p.51).

Yet Fattum did not succumb to her husband's mistreatment for long. At one point when her husband was about to leave the house, she asked him where he was going. His reaction to her audacious question was physical violence. He pushed her and

when she fell on the floor, he started kicking her with his shoes (p. 37). A similar incident occurred, and Fattum once more summoned up her courage and questioned her husband about his whereabouts, and when he tried to grab hold of her, she scratched his face and dug her nails in his shirt screaming hysterically. After this incident she left her marital home and went back to live with her parents in the village refusing to return to her husband.

Fattum's entire life underwent a drastic change when her husband fell ill and had to be operated on.

His health problems prevented him from resuming his job, and so Fattum had to find a job, and in this way, she became the primary breadwinner and head of the household. When Fattum took charge, her husband's absolute authority was shaken. He was relegated to the role of merely objecting, or giving his opinion, while the real decisions were now within the domain of Fattum's responsibilities (p. 152).

Previously, when subjugated by her husband, Fattum compensated for her sorrow and misery by manipulating and dominating the people around her. Her first victim was As'ad, her brother in law. Fattum waited on As'ad and looked after him for, after all, he was her husband's brother, and in return the latter respected her and gave her the care and concern that she never had with her own husband. So when he made up his mind to marry a stranger, Fattum felt suffocated and choked for she loved As'ad, but would not even admit it to herself. So she decided to play match maker and marry him off to a woman of

her choice, his cousin "Hasna". She succeeded only after coercing and intimidating him. Later on As'ad fell in love with another woman, Khadijah, and married her secretly. When Fattum found out, she set out to put an end to his second marriage, and she succeeded. As a result As'ad began to take drugs in order to drown his sorrow, and he openly blamed Fattum and her son, a drug trafficker, for his ailment. As'ad's condition deteriorated until he was found dead in a gutter in one of the suburbs of Beirut (p. 251).

Similarly, Fattum contested her cousin Zayn al-'Abidin's' choice of partner and told him "you must forget this girl". In the end her schemes worked and she managed to split them apart. Moreover, when Ahmad proposed to her daughter Zaynab and proclaimed that they were in love, Fattum refused his proposal and beat her daughter because she had the audacity to fall in love. Again she urged her son Muhamad to marry her niece' although he did not love her, and when her daughter Sumaya fell in love with Samih, she married her off to Zayn al-'Abidin who was already married and who was much older than Sumaya. However, with time, the character of Fattum

undergoes change. Initially, she wanted to marry her son Mahmud to Sa'da whom he never loved and insisted that he should obey her wishes. Yet the death of As'ad changed her. When it came to her son's choice of wife, she told her husband that "there is no compulsion in marriage." She accepted her daughter's wish to further her education, anxiously awaited her graduation, accepted her new job as a school teacher. And when she was told that Sami and her daughter were in love, her reaction was "there is no harm in that. The girl has to experience an honest love story."



This drastic change that took place within Fattum had a great deal to do with her economic situation and psychological condition as well as the sweeping changes that occurred in society as a whole. With time and through interaction with urban people having dissimilar views and ways of life, the people who left their villages and came to live in the city, had no choice but to undergo changes at all levels and particularly in their vision, outlook and mode of thinking.

Translated by Myriam Sfeir

Footnotes:

- 1. the son of her paternal aunt
- 2. the daughter of his maternal aunt
- 3. the son of her maternal aunt
- 4. her sister's daughter

ARAB WOMEN WRITERS AND NOVELISTS*

Compiled and transliterated by Myriam Sfeir

Daisy al-Amir

Born: Alexandria, Egypt in 1935.

Education: Diploma in English Language, University of Cambridge and "Licence" in Arabic Language, University of Baghdad.

Works:

- 1. Al-Balad al-Ba'id al-Ladhi Tuhibb, Beirut, Dar al-Adab. 1964. (collection of short stories)
- 2. Thumma Ta'ud al-Mawjah, Beirut, Dar al-Adab, 1969. (collection of short stories)
- 3. Al-Bayt al-'Arabi al-Sa'id, Beirut, Dar al-'Awdah, 1975. (collection of short stories)
- 4. Fi Dawwamat al-Hubb wa al-Karahiyah, Beirut, Dar al-'Awdah, 1979. (collection of short stories)
- 5. Wu'ud lil-Bay', Beirut, al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah lil-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 1981. (collection of short stories)
- 6. 'Ala La'ihat al-Intizar, Beirut, Dar al-Adab, 1981. (collection of short stories)
- 7. Jirahah li-tajmil al-Zaman, Beirut, al-Mu'assasah al-'Arabiyyah lil-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 1996. (collection of short stories)

Najwa Barakat _____

Born: Beirut, Lebanon, 1960. Education: Diploma in Cinema.

Works:

- 1. Al-Muhawwil, Beirut, Dar Mukhtarat, 1986. (novel, translated into French)
- 2. Havat wa-Alam Hamad Ibn Silanah, Beirut, Dar al-Adab, 1995. (novel)
- 3. Bas al-Awadim, Beirut, Dar al-Adab, 1996. (novel)

- Huda Barakat

Born: Beirut, Lebanon 1952

Education: "Licence" in French Literature

Works:

- 1. Za'irat, Dar al-Matbu'at al-Sharqiyyah, Beirut, 1985. (collection of short stories)
- 2. Hajar al-Dahiq, Dar Riyad al-Rayyis, Beirut, 1990. (novel. translated to French and English)
- 3. Ahl al-Hawa, Dar al-Nahar, Beirut, 1992. (novel, translated into French and English)

Layla Ba'albaki -

Born: Beirut, Lebanon 1936.

Education: "Diplome" in Eastern Civilization, Universite Saint Joseph (USJ).

Works:

- 1. Ana Ahya, Dar Majallat Shi'r, Beirut, 1958. (novel)
- 2. Nahnu Bila Aqni'ah, Beirut, Manshurat al-Tadwin al-Insaniyyah, 1959. (lecture)
- 3. Al-Alihah al-Mamsukhah, Beirut, Matba'at Dar Majallat Shi'r, 1960. (novel)
- 4. Safinat Hanan ila al-Qamar, Beirut, al-Mu'assasah al-Wataniyyah lil-Tiba'ah wa al-Nashr, 1963. (collection of short stories)
- 5. Wardat al-Sahra', Beirut, al-Mu'assasah al-Jami'iyyah lil Dirasat wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi*, 1982.

René al-Hayik

Born: Lebanon in 1959.

Education: "Licence" in Philosophy, Faculty of Arts. Lebanese University.

Works:

- 1. Portrait lil-Nisyan, Beirut, al-Markaz al-Thagafi al- 'Arabi, 1994. (collection of short stories)
- 2. Shita' Mahjur, Beirut, Al-Markaz al-Thagafi al- 'Arabi. 1996. (novel)

Umayyah Hamdan

Born: Sawfar, Lebanon in 1935.

Education: Masters in Arabic literature, American University of Beirut.

Works:

- 1. Majnun Shanay, Beirut, Dar al-Ittihad, 1972. (play)
- 2. Wa Antazir, Beirut, Dar al-Maktabah al- 'Asriyyah, 1977.
- 3. Nugtat al-Bikar, Beirut, 1979. (novel)
- 4. Al-Azrag al-Qadim ma'a al-Rih, Beirut, Dar al-'Afag al-Jadidah, 1980. (novel)

Nuha Tabbara Hammud

Born: Beirut, Lebanon in 1933.

Education: B.A in Fine Arts, Lebanese American University

- 1. Rabi' Bila Wurud, Beirut, Dar Maktabat al-Turath al-Adabi, 1992. (collection of short stories)
- 2. Suhd wa Zilal, Beirut, Dar al-Jadid, 1996. (novel)

Balgis al-Humani

Born: Nabatieh, Lebanon.

Education:

Works:

- 1. Al-Lahn al-Akhir, Cairo, 1961. (collection of short stories)
- 2. Hay al-Lijā, Beirut, Manshūrāt Hamad, 1969. (novel)
- 3. Sa'amurru 'Ala al-Ahzan, Beirut, Dar al-Ma'arif, 1975. (novel)

Wisal Khalid

Born: Beirut, Lebanon in 1943.

Education: "Licence" in Philosophy and Psychology, Faculty of Arts, Lebanese University and Masters in Philosophy from the Sorbonne University.

Works:

- 1. Tadhkarah li-Matahat al-Ghurbah, Beirut, Dar al-Āfaq al-Jadīdah, 1973. (collection of short stories)
- 2. Dumūʻ al-Qamar, Beirut, Dar al-Āfaq al-Jadīdah, 1980. (novel)

- Hanan al-Jarudi al-Sa'id

Born: Beirut, Lebanon.

Education: B.A in English Literature, Lebanese American University.

Works:

- 1. Hādhā Anta, Beirut, Dār al-Nahār lil-Nashr, 1975. (novel)
- La'la' Barīd al-Shams, Beirut, Dar Zuhayr Ba'albaki, 1980. (novel)
- 3. Istighathat al-Fajr, Beirut, Dar Zuhayr Ba'albaki, 1989. (novel)
- 4. Man Anta, Beirut, Mu'assasat al-Rihani, 1990. (novel)

- Nur Salman

Born: Beirut, Lebanon.

Education: B.A in Arabic Literature, Communication Arts, and Social Science and Education, Lebanese American University; M.A in Comparative Literature, American University of Beirut and Doctorate in Arabic Literature, Université Saint Joseph.

Works:

- 1. Faḍaḥikat, Beirut, Dar al-Nashr lil Jami'iyyin, 1961. (novel)
- 2. Ila Rajul lam Ya'ti, Beirut, Dar al-'Ilm lil-Malayin, 1986.
- 3. Al-'ayn al-Ḥamra', London, Dar Riyad al-Rayyis, 1991.
- 4. Yabqā al-Baḥr wa al-Samā', Beirut, al-Maktabah al-'Aṣrīyyah, n.d. (collection of short stories)
- 5. Al-Fajr Ya'shaqu al-Ḥajar, Beirut, Mu'assasat al-Naḥḥal, 1994. (poetry)
- 6. Lan Utfi'a al-Wajd, Beirut, Dar Nahhal, 1997. (poetry)

— Nuha Samarah

Born: Tulkarm, Palestine, 1944.

Education:

Works:

- Fī Madīnat al-Mustanqa', Beirut, Manshurat Zuhayr Ba'albakī, 1973.
- 2. Al-Tawilat 'Ashat Akthar min Amin, Beirut, Manshurat Zuhayr Ba'albaki, 1981.

- Ghadah al-Samman

Born: Damascus, Syria, 1942.

Education: Licence in English Language, Syrian University, Masters in English Literature, American University of Beirut and Ph.D, University of Cairo. Works:

1. 'Aynaka Qadari, Beirut, Dar al-Adab, 1962. (collection

of short stories)

2. Lā Baḥr fī Bayrūt, Beirut, Manshūrāt Ghādah al-Sammān, 1963. (collection of short stories)

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- 3. Layl al-Ghuraba', Beirut, Dar al-Adab, 1966. (collection of short stories)
- 4. Hubb, Beirut, Dar al-Adab, 1973.
- 5. Raḥil al-Marafi' al-Qadimah, Beirut, Dar al-Adab, 1973.
- 6. Bayrut 75, Beirut, Dar al-Adab, 1975.
- 7. A'lantu 'Alayka al-Ḥubb, Beirut, Dar al-Ādab, 1976. (poetry)
- 8. Kawabis Bayrut, Beirut, Dar al-Adab, 1976. (novel)
- 9. Zaman al-Ḥubb al-Ākhar, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1978. (collection of short stories)
- 10. I'tiqal Lahzah Haribah, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1978. (poetry)
- 11. Al-Jasad Ḥaqibat Safar, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1979. (collection of short stories)
- 12. Al-Sibahah fi Buhayrat al-Shaytan, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1979.
- 13. Khatm al-Dhākirah bi al-Sham' al-Aḥmar, Beirut, Manshūrāt Ghādah al-Sammān, 1979.
- 14. Muwatinah Mutalabbisah bi al-Qira'ah, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1979.
- 15. Al-Raghif Yanbud ka al-Qalb, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1980.
- 16. Saffarat Indhar Dakhil Ra'sī, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1980.
- 17. Kitabat Ghayr Multazimah, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1980.
- 18. Al-Ḥubb min al-Warid ila al-Warid, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1980.
- 19. Al-Qabilah Tastajwib al-Qatilah, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1981.
- 20. Laylat al-Milyar, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1986. (novel)
- 21. Al-Baḥr Yuḥākim Samakah, Beirut, Manshurāt Ghādah al-Sammān, 1986. (novel)
- 22. Ghurbah Taḥta al-Ṣifr, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman. 1986.
- 23. Ashhadu 'Aksa al-Rīḥ, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1987. (poetry)
- 24. Al-A'maq al-Muḥtallah, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1987.
- 25. Tasakku' Dākhil Jurh, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1988.
- 26. Al-Taryaq, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1991. (poetry)
- 27. 'Ashiqah fi Mihbarah, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1995. (poetry)
- 28. Shahwat al-Ajnihah, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1995.
- 29. Al-Qamar al-Murabba', Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1996. (collection of short stories)
- 30. Rasa'il Ḥanin ila al-Yasamin, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1996.
- 31. Al-Riwayah al-Mustahilah, Beirut, Manshurat Ghadah al-Samman, 1997. (novel)

Muna Shatila

Born: Beirut, Lebanon, 1957.

Education: "Licence" in Social Sciences, Lebanese University.

Works:

- 1. *Iqa'at ala Dhanab Maykil*, Beirut, Dar Maryam, 1990. (collection of short stories)
- 2. Al-Khā'ibūn, Beirut, Dar Kitabat, 1996. (novel)

_ Hanan al-Shaykh

Born: Beirut, Lebanon 1945.

Education: Sophomore,

Works:

- 1. Intihar Rajul Mayyit, Beirut, Dar al-Nahar, 1970.
- 2. Faras al-Shaytan, Beirut, Dar al-Nahar, 1975.
- 3. Hikāyat Zahrah, Beirut, 1980.
- 4. Wardat al-Saḥrā', Beirut, al-Mu'assasah al-Jami'iyyah lil-Dirasat wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi', 1982. (short story)
- 5. Misk al-Ghazal, Beirut, Dar al-Adab, 1988.
- 6. Barid Bayrut, Cairo, Dar al-Hilal, 1992.
- 7. Ukannisu al-Shams 'An al-Sutūh, Beirut, Dar al-Ādab, 1994. (collection of short stories)

- Salwa Safi -

Born: 'Abadiyah, Lebanon, 1935.

Education: Secondary Education.

Works:

1. Hadiqat al-Şukhur, Beirut, Dar Al-Nahar lil-Nashr, 1966. (collection of short stories)

Layla 'Usayran

Born: Lebanon 1934.

Education: B.A in Political Science, American University of Beirut

Works:

- 1. Lan Namut Ghadan, Beirut, Dar al-Tali'ah, 1960.
- 2. Al-Hiwar al-Akhras, Beirut, Dar al-Tali ah, 1962.
- 3. Al-Madinah al-Farighah, Beirut, Dar al-Hayat, 1966.
- 4. 'Asafir al-Fajr, Beirut, Dar al-'Awdah, 1968.
- 5. Khat al-Af'a, Beirut, Dar al-Fath, 1968.
- 6. Qal'at al-Usta, Beirut, Dar al-Nahar, 1979.
- 7. Jisr al-Hajar, Beirut, Dar al-'Awdah, 1982.
- 8. Al-Istirahah, Beirut, Sharikat al-Matbu'at, 1984.
- 9. Shara'it Mulawwanah min Ḥayatī, Beirut, Dar Riyad al-Rayyis, 1994.
- Ta'ir min al-Qamar, Beirut, Dar al-Nahar lil-Nashr, 1996.

_ Ilham Mansur

Born: Ras Ba'albak, Lebanon, 1944.

Education: Doctorate in Philosophy, Sorbonne University Works:

- 1. Ila Hiba: Sirah Ula, Beirut, Dar al-Farabi, 1991. (novel)
- 2. Hiba fi Riḥlat al-Jasad: Sirah Thaniyah, Beirut, Dar Mukhtarat, 1994. (novel)
- 3. Sawt al-Nay aw Sirat Makan, Beirut, Dar Mukhtarat, 1995.

Emily Nasrallah -

Born: Kfeir, Lebanon, 1931.

Education: B.A in Education, American University of Beirut.

Works:

- 1. Tuyur Aylul, Beirut, al-Mu'assasah al-Ahliyyah, 1962.
- 2. Shajarat al-Dufla, Beirut, Matba at al-Najwa, 1968.
- 3. Al-Rahinah, Beirut, Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1968.
- 4. Jazīrat al-Wahm, Beirut, Bayt al-Ḥikmah, 1973. (collection of short stories)
- 5. Al-Bahirah, Beirut, Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1977.
- 6. Shadi al-Ṣaghir, Beirut, Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1977. (children's story)
- 7. Al-Yunbū', Beirut, Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1978. (collection of short stories)
- 8. *Tilka al-Dhikrayāt*, Beirut, Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1980. (collection of short stories)
- Al-Iqlā 'Aks al-Zaman, Beirut, Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1981.
 Al-Mar'ah fī 17 qissah, Beirut, Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1984. (collection of short stories)
- 11. Al-Tahunah al-Da'i'ah, Beirut, Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1985. (collection of short stories)
- 12. Nisā' Rā'idāt min al-Sharq wa min al-Gharb, Beirut, Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1986. (a study in 2 volumes)
- 13. Khubzunā al-Yawmī, Beirut, Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1990. (collection of short stories)
- 14. Al-Jamr al-Ghāfī, Beirut, Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1995. (novel)
- Khuţūţ al-Wahm al-Rā'i'ah, Beirut, Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1995.
- 16. Mahaṭṭāt al-Raḥīl, Beirut, Mu'assasat Nawfal, 1996. (collection of short stories)
- 17. Yawmiyyat Hirr, Beirut, Dar al-Kitab al- 'Ālami,1997. (collection of short stories)
- 18. Rawat li al-Ayyam, Beirut, Dar al-Ibda', 1997.

Nazik Saba Yarid -

Born: Jerusalem, Palestine in 1928.

Education: Licence in Philosophy from the University of Fu'ad al-Awwal, Cairo and a Ph.D in Arabic Literature from the American University of Beirut.

- Works:
- 1. Nuqtat al-Dā'irah, Beirut, al-Fikr al-Lubnāni, 1983. (novel)
- 2. Al-Sadā al-Makhnūq, Beirut, Nawfal, 1986. (novel)
- 3. Kana al-Ams Ghadan, Beirut, Nawfal, 1988. (novel)
- 4. Tagasim 'ala Watar Da'i', Beirut, Nawfal, 1992. (novel)

* The authors selected appear in two introductory studies to a Bibliography of Lebanese Women Writers Since 1960 conducted by Dr. Samira Aghacy and Dr. Rachid al-Daif and published by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, (IWSAW). Some names have been excluded where the information is incomplete.

File File File File

On the Death of my Dear Friend Nada Adib Haddad (July 5, 1995)

She's dead, dead, and all the city, her city, weeps for her.

We stare at her, a bundle of flesh and bone, her crowns and bracelets, perfumes and soaps, like toys, long forgotten.

Her diamonds and rings lie about her, unkempt, disheveled

her perfume phials and her colored jars jumpy, tense, careful that no scent break loose to startle her. The flowers in her room gasp for breath sniffing up whatever meager air is left for her. Out, out, throw them out.

The shells rip the dark, and cars blow up flashing the sky, blood trickles at her doorstep, the reek of corpses wafts from the bloated graveyard right into her bedroom. Panic-stricken, she drinks the magic herbs to wile the evil spells away.

The sea-foam caressing her thighs, gathers momentum, splashes upon the shore, drenching the air.

She sprinkles her holy waters and fixes her gaze: the breeze sloughs its musty skin and stares back, pure, naked, fragrant, like a god out of the waves.

She stretches herself on the shore and dreams of purple cloaks, robes rustling on marble floors, and gods scouring the world in search of the maiden.

She awakens, stretches her arms to touch the triton.

A hell hound leaps on her, runs his fangs through her flesh, gulps her pounding heart, forcing her to disgorge all the magic herbs and antidotes she had stored for years

The princess is dead. where is the charm that will wake her up?

Samira Aghacy

A CHILDLESS WIFE

I sit behind the window bars and peer through the evening sand, bags of it

entombing the range, barricading the view.

The hours,
thick like musty fluid,
trail on with heavy paces
and return full circle.
The air a sallow crust,
burns in the corridor
pushing into the room.
I remain in my chair
and hear the crack
of skin-bark.
I stare into the dark:
the reek of mossy swamps hits the room.

Dazed with the fumes,
I fall asleep:
his hands caress
rosy arms and legs
that pierce the dark,
flash across the room,
kicking against walls
like bloated sandbags.
The aroma of juices
spurts from a rose-tree
in the middle,
right under the window sill,
where my chair is.

I wake up with a pounding heart. I hear the creaky chair, and the stale air in holes and corners.

Samira Aghacy

TO BE AN ARMENIAN

So many times I have been asked: What does Armenian mean?

File

.... Being an Armenian is having an obsession for the world to know how hard it is to survive with the memories of our lost ones still fresh and vivid in the folds of our minds. It is almost to be a dreamer

waiting to touch the dream. It is a ritual to drop our tears and root our sweat in foreign soils. It is to understand deep in our bones the unfairness of humankind who denies us the chance to be revived in our rights.

It is to climb the soul to reach the truth or to fight the injustice encircling the planet at large.

The Armenian is the one who has lost somewhere in the burning corners of the deserts those who shared the same poem the same blood.

The one who knows the meaning of being tortured and enslaved and how to be chained to the roots of an end.

The special one who has inherited the glory of a past but is nailed to the silence of history.

I know it. I am one of them.

And I can explain with wounds still open the screams that roar inside us.

How can memory erase a massacre?



How can we save the innocents thrown into hell elders women children all of them with their throats slashed in the middle of a song.

We exist here and now but just in halves as we also belong there where old voices are still haunting us.

We dance and laugh in fragments as tragedies are stored in us.

But we believe in resurrection. We believe in new songs and new prayers in dressing God with another robe where the stains of blood will never show.

We can be born again from our ashes.

We have the power to renew inspire create struggle and fight. Simply and forever we are Armenian.

Alicia Ghiragossian

About the Poet

By Azadouhi Kalaidjian

Alicia Ghiragossian is the author of twenty volumes of poetry which have been translated into and published in Italian, Persian, Greek, French, Arabic, Russian and Portuguese. Her work has gained the recognition and admiration of internationally known writers like French poet Jacques Prevert, Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges, Uruguayan poet Juana De Ibanbarou, and American writer William Saroyan, Alicia's poetry was the subject of a Ph. D Thesis in literature at the University of San Paulo, Brazil in 1993. She has taught courses in modern poetry at U.C.L.A. and has given lectures and seminars at universities in different countries. She has participated in world congresses and has served as a juror in international contests of literature. She is covered extensively in the Armenian and Greek Encyclopedia.

Alicia Ghiragossian has brought about a rebirth, a renaissance in poetry through her published poems and her numerous poetry recitals. The acceptance of her work has been massive and unanimous. She is admired and truly loved by the entire Armenian people, whether in Armenia or in its Diaspora, from factory workers to college students, from artists and writers to university professors or Academy members. In 1985 her 35th literary Jubilee was officially celebrated in Los Angeles and in European and Middle Eastern countries. In Yerevan, Capital of Armenia, they have named school classrooms after her, and her bronze bust is placed in the

National Museum of Arts and Literature.

She has won international awards for her poetic achievements, and Yerevan (Armenia) State University has officially presented Alicia Ghiragossian to the Swedish Academy for the Nobel Prize for Literature. The University students indicate in the polls taken during the current year, that for the last three decades Alicia Ghiragossian has been considered a giant in the field of poetry and will be remembered among those poets who have enjoyed a unique place in the history of literature like Garcia Lorca, Ibanbourou, Pushkin, Neruda and Gibran. They claim that Alicia's poetry goes beyond the Armenian ethnic boundaries, as her voice has a universal resonance and makes a rich contribution to world culture.

Maria Paez De Ruiz, a professor of literature at Southwest Texas State University has made the following statement:

"Alicia Ghiragossian's poetry is the ultimate food for the soul. The caliber of her work must be acknowledged and it is imperative that she be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Never before have we encountered poetry which is more deserving of this highest honor.

With her mission of peace, love and art, the world can only become a better place when we allow the seeds of her poetry to be implanted in the hearts of the people." (for more information on the poet see *Al-Raida* issue # 76).

Special Features

R ose Ghurayyib

Ghena Ismail

ruitful action means one concentrated on a useful task, performed in a quiet atmosphere, free from noise and artificiality ... People absorbed in work, intent on thoroughness and creativity, find no time to ruminate on hatred and to contrive intrigues ..."

These words written by Rose twenty years ago best summarize her life story characterized by continuous work and immense productivity. Learning about the author's great contributions, one inevitably wonders, "When did she have the time to write all of this?" The author who started writing songs, articles and poems since she was at school has distinguished herself for a very long time as a pioneer critic and writer of books for children and adolescents in the Arab World, when both criticism and writing for the youth and children were not given due attention in Arabic literature.

Before conducting the interview with Rose, I looked through *Al-Raida* magazine of which she was editor and consultant for nine years to seek information about her. All I could find, though, was a footnote to one of the articles she wrote when she was editor. I looked in other resources as well and was greatly astonished to find that only three interviews had been conducted with the writer throughout her lifetime. When I saw Rose and told her how surprised I was by this, she smiled and said that she had always hated publicity.

To use the same quotation from Plato that Rose used in one of her editorials for Al-Raida, "Love consists of two solitudes that meet, salute and encourage each other", one could say that Rose is one of those few people who value solitude and independence. For Rose, "a ferociously independent woman" as the director of the French Protestant College described her, solitude is needed for building self independence; however, this never implies a rejection of socialization as many people "wrongfully assume". She explains that in life everything is built on the unity of two contradictions: Solitude and sociability, rationality and emotion, freedom and restraint. "People are mistaken when they think I am asocial. I have mixed and interacted with people of various surroundings. I have travelled a lot and taught in several institutions .. I've been to Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, France, Russia, Spain and Czechoslovakia ... I taught in Iraq for three years and at the Protestante College in Beirut for 10 years .. I taught in Saidon for four years and in the Junior College for nine years .. As a teacher I got to know my students closely .. You've got to know and understand people in order to be able to write about them ... "

Close friendships are against Rose's principles since they violate the essence of independence she has always sought. She quotes Gibran Khalil Gibran's words: "Stand together ... but leave spaces where the wind can play." Rose's experiences with friends were not successful. Most of those whom she trusted disappointed her: "I had a teacher whom I viewed as a role model, but discovered later that she was vile. This experience along with others taught Rose that no matter how close someone is to you, you cannot rely on him or her: "The self is one's best friend." Rose asserts.

For Rose, independence should be maintained even within a marital relationship. In an attempt to explain the factors that caused her to remain unmarried, Rose mentions first her involvement in learning and education and the diversity of her interests. Secondly, she says that when she was young, it was not normal for women to mingle with men. Thirdly, she lived in surroundings that were very much different from her own. Even though Rose comes from a Maronite background, she has spent most of her life in Protestant-Islamic surroundings (in Lebanon inter-religious marriages are not acceptable by most families.) The fourth reason Rose gives is her health. Rose's diverse interests exerted much pressure on her health: "After a period of hard work, I had to have a break for six months or a year, and this made me question my ability to cope with a career and marriage at the same time."

Does love have a place in Rose's life? "To me love is universal. I do not have the tendency to attach myself to one person. I am totally against allowing myself to be too close to someone to the extent of finding it difficult to live away from him or her." Rose criticizes people who allow themselves to be swept away by love. She recalls, "I knew a girl in Iraq who committed suicide after her beloved abandoned her... Many people are ready to commit suicide for 'love'." Rose asserts that rationality should always take precedence over emotion.

Rose did not only seek social and psychological independence but also sought economic independence. "At an early stage, I became conscious of the importance of being economically independent." At the age of seventeen, Rose was studying and teaching at the same time. When she entered the Junior College in Beirut, she paid her tuition fees with her own money, and she has also helped her parents financially.

For Rose, writing has always been an attempt to fulfil a psychological and social need. "Whenever I detect a bad social habit, I like to write about it." Rose began to write when she was at school, and the Western schools where she studied played a major role in this respect. She recalls from her school experience that a French teacher once suggested that the students write essays on "the season they like". As Rose chose

to write about Spring, she borrowed expressions from books. However, the teacher explained to her that she should write about her own feelings and personal experiences.2 Obviously, the student took her teacher's advice seriously. This is clearly reflected in Rose's style of Although she drew ideas from Western and old Arabic literature, she rejected any form of imitation, seeking to reflect her own feelings and experiences.

Rose's works include several series of critical books, stories, songs, plays, and social articles. "Behind every kind of writing, I had a different motive." Rose who had taught Arabic for a long time, learnt the importance of criticism at a very early stage: "How can you appreciate what you read if you cannot judge it?!" In 1952, Rose published her M.A. thesis entitled Aesthetic Criticism in Arabic Literature, considered by many critics a pioneer study in criticism, followed by a study of Gibran's works (1969), an Introduction to Modern Literary Criticism (1971), a Biography of May Ziadeh (1978) which is one of the few biographies on an Arab woman writer, a book on Arab women writers and poets (1985), and a book on contemporary feminist movement in the Arab World (1988). Rose, the critic, is described as analytical and objective: "Rose's depth is clearly reflected in her analytical criticism ... Textual reading cannot be isolated from historical reading and linguistic analysis is directly related to psychological analysis. Rose reads the text through her multifaceted vision and comprehensive education."3

The writing of stories, songs and plays was triggered by voluntary activities targeted at children and young people. Writing stories, in particular, was in demand and the publishers encouraged it. In 1948, Rose published a series of songs for children entitled The Childrens' This was only the beginning of a profusion of other books - more than 50 target at children and youth-which proved to be very successful because they filled a big gap. Rose likes to re-present old myths and popular proverbs in modern and realistic forms supplementing them with personal experiences. A well known critic in Al-Hayat newspaper described Rose's children's

literature as non-traditional: "She has given great attention to imagination, shying away from stereotypical examples and lessons that focus upon direct and passive methods of learning. Rose Ghurayyib's stories drive children to soar in an imaginative world without forgetting that they are living in reality ... Rose Ghurayyib has provided the Children of



Lebanon and the entire Arab world with a great library ..."4 Rose did not only write stories and songs for children, but also composed tunes for them.

In Rose's opinion, Arabic Literature has prospered over the years. She notes the important role emigrant progressive

writers such as Gibran Khalil Gibran have played in this respect. She points out, however, that few of these writers tried their hand on story writing. "Arabic literature, which is rich in poetry, is very poor in stories and plays, and the state of criticism is even worse." Unfortunately, in Lebanon as in all Arab countries, criticism is synonymous with praise." Rose hardly takes peoples' criticism of her books seriously. Her best critic is herself. This attitude: is merely an extension of Rose's general attitude: "I do not care about the attitude of society ... The person who allows him or herself to be influenced by society is inevitably a weak person ... I refuse to behave like 'a goat', acting out of blind jealousy and imitation."

A great part of Rose's literary contribution is related to women's issues. For thirteen years and without any expectation of reward, Rose contributed to the magazine of Sawt al-Mar'ah, The Woman's Voice, which was founded in Lebanon in 1945. She studied the existentialist theory of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir and summarized De Beauvoir's. The Second Sex.

Rose states that her feminism goes back to the feminist movement that was very strong in the 1930s and was directly related to the presence of Western schools and missionaries. She also refers to her own personal experience pointing out, however, that her parents' attitude was positive and fair on the whole: "My parents encouraged me to pursue my education, and my mother who was very progressive insisted on sending me to a Protestant American boarding school despite the nuns' objection to the idea." This does not negate, however, that there were times when Rose was treated differently from her two brothers. She also recalls that in her days the school curriculum for girls was different from that of boys: "When I entered college, I wanted to major in biology, but I couldn't because my background in the sciences was weak." Rose clearly sensed social discrimination against women in the way her father, uncles and neighbors treated their wives. My uncle used to reprimand his wife because she did not contribute to the family income .. My father got extremely upset with my mother when her parents did not give her the sum of money they had promised her." Rose, who believes that women's oppression in the Arab world is multi-faceted, supports Arab feminists in all their demands; nevertheless, she has never encouraged sexual freedom because she thinks it has proved to be harmful to individuals and to society wherever it was practiced. She adds that the question of sexual freedom has not been fully discussed in books and magazines. (See an article that Rose wrote on this topic in her book Adwa'a 'ala al-Harakah al-Nisa'iyyah al-Mu'asirah, p.400).

Rose's displacement from Damour in 1976 hindered her writing activities. In the year 1983, and after staying at the Lebanese American University (LAU) for seven years with the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), she moved to the only refuge left for her, a rest house close to a monastery which is isolated from intellectual and cultural activities. According to Rose, this affected her literary input:

"Since the year 1983, I have published only five books."

Finally, I asked Rose, "Do you consider yourself happy?" She shrugged and remained silent for a few moments before telling me: "My life has been a constant struggle. I have always thought that I must develop ... Everyday must bring me some new idea, a new discovery. When I fail I blame myself for the failure." Rose adds that happiness is an absolute value. and therefore it is hard to say that someone is happy: "I can say I am content or satisfied because I followed that path ... the path of development and growth. Life is a quest. One can never reach perfection ... Whenever I accomplish something, I always tell myself, "But it could have been better."

Notes:

- 1. Al-Raida issue #4, June 1978.
- 2. Campbell, Robert. A'lam al-Adab al-'Arabī al-Mu'asir. Beirut: The German Institute for Oriental Studies, 1996.
- 3. Al-Nahar Newspaper, March 10, 1987.
- 4. Al-Nahar Newspaper, March 10, 1987.

IDENTIFICATION CARD

Birth: Damour, Lebanon, 1909.

Education: A graduate of American Junior College, (now Lebanese University), American received her B.A., and M.A.

in Arabic literature from the American University of Beirut.

Teaching Career: Taught at various institutions, including Sidon Girls' School; Mosul Secondary School, Iraq; the French Protestant College, Beirut; and Beirut Univesity College (now Lebanese American University) where she taught Arabic for over 20 years.

Awards: The Medal of the Association of University Graduates in Lebanon, 1968, the Cedar Order, 1971, the Gold Medal of Education, 1980.

Membership: The League of Women's Rights, 1945-1947, the Association of University Graduates in Lebanon. 1965-1970, the Lebanese Children's Literature Committee.

Mai Yamani:

A SAUDI ARABIAN ANTHROPOLOGIST

Myriam Sfeir

hile in England I had the chance to meet Dr. Mai Yamani, a social anthropologist and editor of the Feminism and Islam. Dr. Yamani and I decided to meet in a hotel in Knightsbridge. Given that I had never met her before we started exchanging hints as to how we were going to recognize each other. She told me that she was a petite with dark hair and explained that she looked very Arab. I had difficulty recognizing her at first for I expected her to be much older. After chatting for a while I started my interview.

Mai Yamani was born in Cairo in 1956 during the Suez war at the height of Arab nationalism. Her father is Saudi Arabian from Mecca and her mother Iraqi originally from Musil and brought up in Basra. In terms of her sense of identity and belonging Yamani feels, and has always felt, strongly Saudi Arabian and especially Meccan. The Yamanis travelled between Baghdad, Cairo, and Jeddah, and Mai Yamani believes that this exposure was extremely beneficial in the shaping of her character: "I'm very content with our way of life. The kind of exposure I experienced was enriching, and it depends on how one benefits from it. Inspite of their exposure, a lot of people settle for what is there and do exactly what has to be done. It was not the case with me, my life was a struggle and a constant search for identity..." In the 1960's there were very few schools in Saudi Arabia, and in Jeddah, specifically, there were no schools except al-Quttab for learning and memorizing the Ouran and the Hadith. So, Mai Yamani started off with a French education where she attended a boarding school in Switzerland for 9 Immediately after years. Switzerland she left for the U.S.A where she spent four years at Bryn Mawr College for

Yamani took her studies

girls.

very seriously and was adamant on becoming an anthropologist: "I have had this passion to observe and learn about other cultures, peoples, and patterns of behavior. I have always acted as an ethnographer and have been an anthropologist ever since I started at Bryn Mawr in 1975." She received her BA in cultural anthropology and attended Oxford University where she studied for a masters degree in the same field. She chose anthropology because it brings together the disciplines of sociology and psychology: the former looks at modern societies, while the latter focuses more on the individual's mind. She became immersed in her studies and learned about primitive societies, the aborigines in Australia, and the Africans.

Upon graduating she went back to Saudi Arabia in 1981 and taught sociology and social anthropology to female students at King Abd al-Aziz University. It turned out to be a very good experience for both Yamani and her female students given that she had personal contact with the girls unlike their previous male professors who used to give their lectures via television.

All along, her father supported her education though she faced a lot of external problems from society at large: "How can I explain or define the pressure, tension, and guilt people burden you with when you don't conform to the norm." Yamani knew that she would never fit in for she felt different from most of her friends and from most Saudi women as well. The pressure to marry and live a "normal" life was always there, and she recounts that when she was younger, she always wanted to marry and have six children. She explains that this has a lot to do with one's "upbringing, one's expectations of oneself as a woman, ..." Yamani admits that both her daughters, "the achievement of her life," and her husband have been very supportive of her work over the years. At the end of the day "you have to do it yourself and constantly push your way, for authority is not given but taken." According to her it is only with tenacity that one can succeed and get somewhere.

> Yamani defines rebellion as departing from the norm and from what is She affirms traditional. throughout her life, whether it was in her choice of education or marriage, in the fact that she didn't cover her hair or conform to the prevalent

dress code, that she considered herself rebellious. According to Yamani, "If you want to be an Arab you should know the boundaries, and from within you can have more flexibility. I've learned not to break the limits but to stretch them because when you do so you remain part of the system ... without being stigmatized. In this manner you achieve a balance between freedom and dignity."

After teaching for several years in Saudi Arabia, Yamani returned to Oxford University one more time to do her Ph.D. which dealt with Saudi society and questions of social identity in the Hijaz region. At that time she was already married with a daughter; however, a lot of

married with a daughter; however, a lot of people were shocked by her decision: "What's wrong with this lady, how is she going to do a Ph.D. with a baby to care for?" Yet despite the criticism and complaints, received encouragement from others. particularly because she was conduct field work Saudi Arabia for a vear and a half. According Mai

quest and an academic pursuit ... suddenly I was able to answer a lot of questions by observing an analyzing."

Yamani her

thesis "was a

personal

'Profession of Faith", 1991-92, ceramic, green glazes With time her interests Wasma'a K. Chorbachi changed, and instead of focusing on questions of social identity, symbols, colors, rituals, norms and patterns she adopted a more practical approach in her research: "Once you have a particular problem, you go out there in the field and test it in an attempt to come up with answers, and that's what I'm doing for I feel that I want to do something other than just sit and wait." Yamani believes that a great deal of discrimination is prevalent in the Arab world with very little equality between the sexes, and this discrimination is justified under the banner of the concept of honor and shame. According to Yamani, in

the name of 'ayb and shame we have been held back, and one of the major reasons is the economic situation which has a strong impact on the concept of honor and shame. In Saudi Arabia, women comfortably sit back and hire drivers to take their children to school, maids to do the housework, ... Although these women have been deprived of other avenues to power such as participation in the political process, they have access to money through inheritance where according to the law in the country and the sharī'ah, women have rights in this respect. Yet what is the point of having so much money if women remain under the control of men: women cannot travel without their husband's approval and permission."

Yamani believes that change will come with time: "In Islam we have a serious problem with family law (divorce, custody, etc.).

These laws have to change." Arab women

are still submerged in ignorance. For instance, in the Hanbali law a woman ask for her right divorce, yet, many women are still unaware of their rights and are obsessed with al-'avb and what people would say. Yamani affirms that in talking about equality there is so

much room for improvement, but it has to come from the women themselves. They should have the knowledge and then the desire

to change. Once a woman breaks these concepts and chains she loses the fear and in

turn feels free. Yamani states that although 65% of university graduates in Saudi Arabia are women, only 5% are part of the work force: "I am not saying that all of them should start working, yet some women should be involved at the decision making level." Yamani holds that as far as her generation is concerned there is no possibility of envisaging any drastic changes. Yamani asserts that through her research she is hoping to make a difference "by sharing and publishing my works. At the same time I want to be able to communicate

with other women. There is no point in having a few elitist educated women from Bangledesh, India, Pakistan, etc. who speak English and French and are conscious of their rights and their writing, but unable to help the poorer and less fortunate women.'

Yamani defines her feminism as an awareness and conviction that the position of women in Arab societies and other societies should be improved. She asserts that one should not sit back but should play an active role in consciousness raising: "My feminism is not a mission, I don't walk around saying oh yes I'm a feminist, but when a situation arises I react to it immediately... we have to question and challenge the prevalent discourse." Yamani asserts that being a feminist depends on the person you are and on the circumstances. In countries where Islam legitimizes all political, social, and economic activities, women can only demand their rights from within the shari'a and the primary sources (the Qur'an and the Hadith). Yamani believes in moderation and would "read the Our an and interpret it in a more modern and moderate way." Yamani affirms that interpretation is a very complex manner and holds that the fundamentalists exploit religion for their own purposes.

Yamani is a possitive person; she believes in positive thinking and advocates accepting people the way they are. Concerning the hijab Yamani explains that wearing the hijab is a matter of choice: "I used to watch the heavily veiled female students at the university. I understood and respected them for they are seeking to understand, define and preserve their identity. They are trying to make a statement. I don't mind if people want to wear it, but I don't want them to impose it or to pronounce judgement on me (I have been constantly criticized) because I don't wear it."

Yamani asserts that living in London has been a happy, successful, and productive experience for the freedom of expression and the possibilities it offers. She explains that London nowadays is the capital of the Arab intellectuals who are in self imposed exile. Most of the Arab academics, intellectuals and journalists have chosen to live there: "I'm not saying that I'm one of them for I go back to my country all the time. Yet, so many intellectuals in London who cannot go back to their countries or to Beirut have remained here." Although she enjoys her life in England, however, Yamani explains that she has faced a great deal of discrimination: "Westerners have preconceived notions about Arabs. You are labeled immediately, and being Saudi you must be as a consequence, very rich and stupid." Yet, she affirms, on the whole, that racism and preconceived ideas prevail on both sides, Arabs as well as Westerners.

Mai Yamani maintains that Westerners are interested in Saudi women because an aura of mystery surrounds them. They are also interested in Arab women, Islam, and the veil. Yamani explains that the idea of organizing a conference on feminism and Islam came about after she gave a lecture entitled "Feminism Behind the Veil" on the situation of Saudi Women today at The Royal United Services Institute for Defense Studies at Whitehall. Shibly al-Mallat attended the lecture and suggested organizing a conference and in fact that's what they did. It was not one conference, but a two year series of lectures that went on and on and resulted in a network among Arab women. They had speakers from all around the Arab world, academicians and scholars such as Tujan al-Faisal, Leila Ahmad (whose contributions do not appear in the book entitled Feminism and Islam: Legal and Literary Perespectives, 1996), and many others.

Yamani is currently heading a project entitled "The New Generation in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)" for her area of interest is the Arab world and more specifically the Arab Gulf states: "I'm interested in these countries which have similar characteristics. They are overpopulated and they are very rich in oil." Yamani explained that in the Arab Gulf states namely Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qattar, U.A.E, Bahrain and Kuwait, over 40 % of the population is under fifteen years of age and only 4% are over sixty. Given that not enough is known about the values, motivations, and aspirations of young people to assess how they might respond to the challenges ahead, the project aims to meet the need for more information and to find out from members of the new generation themselves what they have to say about

who they are. The questions are related to their education

> training. aspirations, vocational their access and exposure to different sources of

information, their values,

Yamani is very eager to start working on this project which will begin September 1997. woman, Yamani's task will be easier than that of a male researcher for she will be allowed to interview both men and women. Also the fact that she is an Arab who speaks the native Arabic language and has had previous experience of conducting fieldwork in Saudi Arabia, (where she conducted interviews for her doctoral thesis). will facilitate her endeavor. The findings of this research will serve as a valuable contribution enriching Arab libraries.

IDENTIFICATION CARD

Bryn Mawr College graduate, received her MA and Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from Oxford University, taught at King Abdul Aziz University, Saudi Arabia. She was a research fellow at the Center for Cross Cultural Research on Women at Oxford and served as an academic adviser to the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies at Georgetown Washington DC. University, She is currently Associate Fellow at The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Middle East Prgramme, House, London. Chatham

ribute to Edward Said "For a Critical Culture"



Mona Takieddine Amyuni

The Théâtre de Beyrouth, the Center for Behavioral Research at the American University of Beirut, Dar al-Adab, and Dar al-Nahar organized a Conference in Beirut (June 29 to July 2nd) to pay tribute to Edward Said, the leading Arab intellectual in the world.

It is high time for an Arab country to pay tribute to Said who has been acclaimed and honored in the most prestigious world institutions. That the event should take place in Beirut took a particular importance since pre-war Beirut was considered by poets, authors, and intellectuals as the platform of the Arab World, its conscience, and the only free space in the whole of this region.

Indeed, Beirut rose to the occasion. The 30 guests-authors and scholars - who came from abroad were very impressed by the vitality of the city, the enthusiasm of its people, and the high standard of the conference. Thus Beirut reclaimed her position as the cultural capital of the Arab World.

The Conference started with a session on the intellectual. It tackled several of the issues that Edward Said discusses in his book Representations of the Intellectual (1994). Eqbal Ahmad, the Pakistani poet and academician, situated Said

amongst the foremost twentieth century intellectuals, namely Benda, Gramsci, Sartre, Chomsky and Foucault. Ahmad underlined the fact that Said was the only universal, non-Western intellectual in this prestigious group. Ahmad agreed with Said that the Intellectual was, by definition, an individual in dissent, a marginal creature, an outsider who keeps away from power to safeguard his integrity and freedom. The Intellectual, of course denounces abuses of all kinds and functions beyond boundaries and demarcation lines. A spirit in opposition, an independent thinker, the Intellectual speaks for all those deprived of speech.

Following the opening session, several panels on East/West and West/East relationships, and on critical literary theory triggered interesting discussions among the speakers and the audience. The closing session was entitled "The Idea of Palestine," while films were shown in the presence of their producers Tareq Ali, Michel Khleifi and Mohammad Malas.

The Conference reached its climax when Edward Said read sections of his Memoirs. We had the privilege to partake of this "première" for the Memoirs are not yet published. And while this brilliant scholar cried and made us cry as he evoked his mother, we felt that he truly represented the human being whose heart, soul, and mind worked together, and bore the idea of man/woman at its highest level.

Moreover, Edward Said has rightly claimed that there has been a revolution in the consciousness of women, minorities, and marginals so powerful as to affect main-stream thinking. Scholars all over the world have testified to the fact that Said's now classic book Orientalism has been instrumental in such a revolution. Translated into 26 languages, Orientalism speaks both to West and East and re-defines relationships with Self and Other at the historical, socio-economic, and personal levels.

The fully packed audience, who came to pay tribute to Edward Said in Beirut, acknowledged it fully. Men and women of all age groups applauded him and told him, in words or silently, "thank you for being Edward, thank you for being what your are."

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Book reviews

"Ahdaf Soueif-Taking on the Modern World's Challenges"

In the Eye of the Sun, by Ahdaf Soueif New York: Vintage International, 1994, 2d ed. 785 pages Reviewed by Patricia F. Roland

This novel delineates a young Egyptian woman's search for self-knowledge, identity, and independence. Soueif uses as a starting point her heroine's coming of age as a Muslim in Egypt. The author follows her heroine, Asya, as she moves from the sphere of her native country to a larger, international arena, expanding her circle of reference. In the course of these travels, Asya explores her womanhood, testing her boundaries and capabilities—intellectual, emotional, and sexual—all of which are portrayed candidly.

The novel encompasses various locales including Beirut; Cairo and Alexandria, Egypt; New York; Italy; and England, where Asya attends graduate school. As a counterpoint to the heroine's maturation, the author uses headlines and press-release-type notations from all over the Middle East to focus on the complex drama unfolding there. Since the novel covers May 1967 through April 1980, there is no shortage of compelling political activity in the Middle Eastern theater: the 1967 Six Day War and the 1970 ousting of the Palestinian Resistance from Jordan, for example.

Another counterpoint used effectively is the insertion of the protagonist's pursuit of a PhD in linguistics, which coincidentally mirrors the author's own academic resumé. The author uses the protagonist's thesis as a metaphor for the latter's personal development: while Asya deconstructs language to its parts, then analyzes the interplay of those parts, both she and the author use this tearing down and rebuilding to point up the fits and starts in Asya's own life.

This novel is built around the dynamics of a relationship Asya entered into as a teenager, one condoned by her extended family and that of her intended. As in so many Middle Eastern novels, the protagonist is essentially locked into the relationship early on in life, apparently destined to stay put; and any personal development a young woman can muster will presumably be done from within the boundaries of this situation, in accordance with more-often-than-not strict constraints of both families'

religious beliefs, social standing, etc. (Asya's family, for example, being Egyptian Muslim, upper-class literati).

But in this late-twentieth century scenario, in a world increasingly Europeanized and internationalized, the lives of its inhabitants have necessarily become more complex, and it is incumbent upon them to sort through the complicated issues encountered in the course of daily life. They struggle through the ongoing conflict of traditional versus modern lifestyles/mores, a struggle intensified by all this international boundary crossing, leaping from one culture to another in the midst of political skirmishes. And some of the denizens of this modern world don't muddle through in the long run: they're pulled apart and twisted until they can no longer cope, their world implodes. At times, it seems that Asya's husband may end up as one of these casualties-a victim of the turbulent times and places he visits-while the protagonist shows promise that she'll manage to not only maintain her integrity, but succeed at establishing her identity in this mutable, confusing world.

The cyclical structure of the novel reflects the idea that the day-to-day life and traditions of one's family and home country constitute a great wheel that rolls along as life rolls along, ultimately bringing one back around to the things that really matter, that will always be there. What propels life is the transference of this most-valuable legacy from generation to generation, and those familiar stanchions will endure, will be there to support us, whether we choose to acknowledge them or not. Soueif's description of this all-important day-to-day life evokes the craft of her literary compatriots Naguib Mahfouz, Tawfiq Al-Hakim, and Nawal El-Saadawi.

As the novel develops, the reader realizes that this novel explores more than the usual, straightforward debate of whether the modern Arab woman is right or wrong to discard traditional components of her native culture while moving into the wider sphere of the modern world; one other important thread woven into the tapestry of this story is an examination of the roles played by women and men, a pointed dissertation on sexual politics.

By the end of the novel, the reader is left with this flicker of possibility: Could it be that while the men are so busy mucking about with their power plays—jockeying for financial/social position, and trying to prove that they dominate the sexual battlefield—the women are pushing steadily ahead, quietly discovering and strengthening themselves...proving themselves, in the long haul, to be the conquerors, and men the vanquished—a sort of tortoise and hare scenario?

The Memory of the Body Dhākirat Al Jasad

Ahlam Mustaghanmi Beirut: Dar Al-Ādab, 1993

Reviewed by Saleh Ibrahim

We can enter the world of *Dhākirat Al-Jasad* through the passage of the homeland, the passage of suffering and pain. It is a novel that begins with the homeland and ends with it. At first, Si el-Taher died, and Khaled was injured in the war against the French occupation and his hand was amputated. Then, the story begins, a story of love, exile and bitter endurance. Hassan, Khaled's brother, is killed by mistake in Algeria. That's the end of the story.

Khaled carries his wounds to France where he lives a painful love story with an Algerian writer and a transient love affair with a French woman. Khaled's Palestinian poet friend dies in Lebanon, and he goes back, almost devastated to his homeland.

The homeland is, sometimes, simplified into a city, Costantine, which represents every Arab city (p. 154). Thus, to belong to this city is to belong to the Arab world: "You cannot belong to this city without feeling its Arab identity." (p. 318). The author shows that in Algeria "Some pray .. while some get drunk ... and the rest rob the country" (p. 345) For this reason, Khaled cries out: "You pimps .. robbers .. murderers .. you will not rob our blood also .. Fill your pockets with whatever you like .. your accounts with any currency ... We will always have our blood and memory. With these, we will hold you responsible ... We will pursue you .. And we will build this country ..." (p. 395).

Women like "Ahlam" or "Hayat" represent "a whole country" (p. 381), and Khaled represents a whole generation, the generation of rebellion. While Khaled's love for Ahlam is an expression of the generation's love for their country, Ahlam's marriage to Si el-Taher is a representation of the occupation of the virgin land by the robbers and pimps who symbolize corrupt authority.

Within the same context, the novel deals with the relationship between Algeria and France. For Khaled, Catherine who represents France, is a woman with whom he had a transient affair (p. 165). She is the woman who was always on the verge of becoming his beloved but never was (p.76). Their meeting represents the meeting between Algeria and France. They have "met for more than a century, without really knowing each other ... without precisely loving each other, .. a mysterious attraction brought them together" (p. 403).

Here, the novel returns to reality. Khaled asserts that the roles are reversed - France has rejected us. To get a "visa just for a few days' visit has become impossible" (p.318). After an evening party in France, "from which our native country was absent" they spoke in French about Algerian funded projects that were going to be implemented by foreign groups, Khaled wondered: "Have we truly gained our independence?" (p. 234)

We can also approach this novel from the psychological perspective, manifested in Khaled's and Hayat's internal psyche. Having lost her father when she was a child, Hayat tries to compensate through writing. She tries to resurrect her father through her love for Khaled; however she fails both ways. She asserts: "I would have preferred to have had a normal childhood and a normal life, to have a father and family like other people, instead of a pile of books and journals." (p. 105). She eventually marries a man her father's age, but continues to love Khaled, her father's real and best friend.

Khaled who fought against the French occupation and lost his left arm in the battlefield, leaves Algeria after Independence and goes to France. There he meets Hayat, daughter of his commander who died during the war. His love for Hayat can be seen as a substitute for his love for Algeria, their native land.

We learn from the novel that Khaled lost his mother when he was a teenager and that he suffers from the Oedipus complex, as he very often confuses the mother with the lover. He tells the woman he loves: "When did my madness about you start? When you became my daughter? or the moment I imagined that you were my mother?!" (p.140) When he compares between his real mother and other women he had known, he says: "I compensated for my mother with a thousand other women .. but I did not grow up. I compensated for her breasts with a thousand more beautiful breasts but I did not quench my thirst .. I compensated for her love with more than one love story but was not satiated ... " (p.329)

In addition to this, and as a result of an inferiority complex that he suffers from owing to the amputation of his arm, Khaled resorts to painting as a form of sublimation, or to use a more technical word from psychology, he substitutes. He says: "I, who used to draw with one hand to recover the other hand, would have preferred to remain a normal man with two arms and to perform ordinary daily tasks, rather than be transformed into a genius that carries sketches and paintings under his arm." (p.106)

I asked Ahlam Mustaghanmi: "How could you write a novel of more than 400 pages and maintain this emotional abundance and poetic language?" After a few moments of silence, her answer was: "Writing stimulates me. Sometimes I cry. I cry, and tears truly fall ..."

Dhakirat Al Jasad - fertile imagination, gushing poetry, a wound and a tear. Since we cannot summarize it, you must read it.

Translated from Arabic by Ghena Ismail